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The Intimate Story of a Girl

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TO THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF DEVIL
IN THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF US THAT
HAVE ROUSED ME TO THE WRITING
OF THIS BOOK.

THE AUTHOR

DAMNED

CHAPTER I

AN air of apprehension pervaded the throne-room. The most imperfect day known for ages in the Court of Gehenna was drawing to a close. The seven Tartarean courtiers had effaced themselves as far back in the auditorium as the folds of its black and red electric hangings would permit. Each held eyes and ears intent, realizing far too well that his particular tenure of preferment hung upon the mood of the moment. Even the prime minister, Old Original Sin, who had weathered so many Apollyon storms that he well might have considered himself immune, sat ill at ease in his chair of honour upon the dais.

His Satanic Majesty leaned forward from the throne, imposing in its effect of onyx and gold. His head drooped as though from weight other than the voltage of his crown. His elbows pressed upon the chair-arms, that both his strong, long hands might stroke in turn his pointed, copper-coloured beard. About the room, as lightning plays in advance of thunder, flashed his glances. When he spoke, although in a mild voice, each auditor quivered through taut nerves.

"Draw the night curtains. Throw on every switch. I dislike this pale, abiding light."

Without awaiting the attendants, the courtiers sprang to do the royal will. Sin himself operated the electric switch-board. At his touch, a design in heraldry blazed from the wall behind the dais. In pseudo-seeming, bands of ebony and of beryl formed the setting for a golden crown in bas-relief, its points pricked out with emeralds. Projecting from

its headband, three horns of power suspended from their tips the ruby-writ words "Japheth," "Shem" and "Ham." The crown itself appeared to rest upon a sword that dripped all jewels known, like tears of every agony, from those of water to those of blood. Beneath, through letters transparent as thin sardonyx, flamed this caption:

SATAN the FIRST and LAST
Outcast of Paradise
Heir-apparent to Earth
Monarch of Greater Gehenna

His Highness glanced back at this elaborate conceit and a gratified expression crossed his face. He signed a page to spread out his crackling mantle of gold-bordered black; slanted a self-respecting look at the splendid proportions revealed through his easy-fitting body garment of opaque red light; then matched his long-nailed finger-tips in pairs.

The seven waited with increased perturbation. They knew that calm, considering look to presage some diabolical idea; they realized that no flattery might blind that super-keen sight, and appreciated that the day had run too unevenly for hope of a restful end.

From the moment of the royal rising that early morn, the King had seemed of malevolent mind. The attendants in his private suite insisted that he had quit the royal bed from the right side. Yet he had seemed to assimilate perversity from his static shower, declaring the current hot when, in fact, it was cold as refrigeration could make it. In a passion, he had unwound the small dynamo of a new costume considered by his chief tailor a "creation"; later he had hurled his breakfast filectric-mignon at the first chef, asserting that it bore no resemblance, either in appearance or gastronomic satisfaction, to the beefsteaks of men.

The inadequate light cast by his pet device, an imitation of Sol, had provoked a personally conducted investigation of the mammoth power plant in the lower badlands. Disre-

garding the affairs which awaited his personal direction, he had spent the noon hour tinkering at the mechanism of his sun, moon and flock of stars.

At the General Assembly of Demons his ill-temper had gained momentum. After listening for a time in sneering impatience to suggestions offered as amendments to the general proposition of standardizing crime, he had hurled upon that august body a very cataclysm of political overthrow. One by one he had assailed the ministry, down to the most faded of those angel plotters cast out with him at The Fall. Announcing that he would run the nether world alone and unaided, he had dissolved the cabinet, assigning its members to labours futile as their protests.

In view of his treatment of those who had served him so long and so infernally, what was in store for mere courtiers, sycophants of a few recent centuries?

When he straightened in the throne-chair, each of the seven straightened with him. When, tilting his crown at an easier slant, he glanced speculatively about, all crowded back against the highly charged curtains and tried to look indifferent at the shock.

His gaze settled upon the prime minister.

"Sin, you aborigine, a word!"

Old Original—so called because his visability, like the King's own, had never dimmed—made obvious effort to assume the sang-froid of one who knows himself to be indispensable; he sauntered to the steps, and bent in an obeisance of elaborate mockery.

"Future of the Universe, I await your will," he remarked, with a nasal twang.

Satan looked contemptuous of his handyman's forced effrontery.

"I know you do. You've taken to awaiting my will far too much for your own good. There was a time when you were full of vile ideas, but you've lost your ingenuity of late. Since when have you designed a sin-mask that would deceive the least suspicious of earthlings, or invented a new form of torture with which to demonstrate our canons of damnation?"

The aged demon, forced on the defensive, eyed the Master with reproach.

"Æons agone there ceased to be anything new beneath the sun, and I——"

"And you," His Highness interrupted, "may be dispensed with if that is true. I am proficient in all the old tricks myself. However, I am disposed to give you a chance to disprove it, being ever kind and just. Is not that true?" The lightning of his look threatened the seven sycophants. "Am I not ever kind and just?"

"As the hope of Hell!"

"Oftener than ever!"

"In our best-worst interests, Sire!"

The medley whined from the shimmering shadows.

Sin's voice gained in assurance, even as his mind lost at the trend of Satanic argument.

"But, my King, haven't I had the whole mortal world at war? Didn't I trick all peoples into slaughter of each other as you planned?"

"I notice that you use the past-perfect tense in speaking of that late little unpleasantness. As a matter of fact, we lost out on it—lost our one best bet since Noah and the Flood. How did you make the mistake of assuming that any scrapper who falls fighting for his country could be condemned by his fellow men? The worst of them is guaranteed a passport to Abraham's bosom. As for the leaders—the brains of the drive—most of them were lost to us through that meanest of mortal weaknesses, fear for the integrity of their own hides. They all want to live. That is what's wrong with conquerors. When earth-wars are such good training for——"

His Highness' teeth bit the sentence in two. His sabre-like gaze slashed suspiciously from face to face.

"You do your own army an injustice to compare its morals with that of any on earth," soothed the old toady. "I'll acknowledge that I am somewhat used up. Even Sin might get brain-fag, you know."

"That excuse is antedated. You have had ample time to recuperate." The royal digits made a crackling sound as they touched. "You failed egregiously on every important

specification of the big fight. Did you keep them at it until the world was engulfed in one red sea of gore? Did you inoculate hate until it overruled every gentler human impulse? Did you overcome the too-young at home and the too-old who were to instruct them, and the women who were to bear the spawn to continue the slaughter? With all the possibilities of modern wholesaleness, that war was not half what it should have been."

"Admitting all you say," the prime minister defended, "I don't see cause for your august dissatisfaction over our progress with the mortal world."

"You don't? What you need is an oculist."

His Majesty descended the steps and began to pace the great room.

"I have had a day of realization," he continued in lifted voice. "Something must be done. Things are too slow to suit my purposes. We are not getting our share of those who enter Shadow Land. Far too many are ticketed through to the Fields by Mors."

"You know, Sire, something of my efforts to buy that stubborn old keeper of the outer gate," interpolated Sin. "Nothing I offer seems to have any value to him. He is polite enough, but drones always the same reminder that for the present he must abide by the records of Earth."

"The trouble is not with Mors, fool fiend," Satan snapped. "It is with that book of his—with the 'Judgments of Men.' The feelings of mortals do soften sickeningly towards their dead. They say that the good die young. Certainly we try to see to it that the bad die old. That's why everything has seemed to depend upon our new searchlight summoning towers. Mors is able, with only two such towers ranged on either side of the Mystery Gate, to make his lists, set his automatic finders, and turn on his power. What results? Every evening and all night long they come at his call. There's certainly nothing attractive about the patriarch. He is grim as the first law of mortality and looks it. Yet every witness he subpœnas *comes*. Nothing stops them, the long, drear journey, the fear of the unknown, the hissing belly-crawlers along the way. What happens when *I* build a

dozen searchlight towers to his two? I make my selected list of earthlings for whom no modern Ananias could pass a good word. I set my finders and turn on all the power we can generate. With what result?"

Glaringly though he challenged reply, none who knew his latest scheme to add to the population of his kingdom dared remind him of its failure. Of necessity he answered himself.

"For a week now our tower tops have been shafting calls to Earth. Has one of the nominated accepted? I am forced to admit that there is something more to this death business than searchlighting. I've never been so disappointed since Pontius Pilate double-crossed me."

"Wait until Mors summons the choice crowd of leaders who started the world war," Sin suggested.

"Wait? That seems to be your persistent idea. I tell you that we can't afford to wait."

Halting before the lesser fiend, Satan seared him with a look.

"I don't expect you to suggest where the Associated Electricians of Gehenna have failed. And in other respects your title and office are jeopardized. I offer you a last chance to save them. If overnight you invent some new feasible scheme for conscripting earthlings into our standing army, your job is saved. If not——"

"The feasible idea already is invented and its workings under way, O King. Compared with it, all our past schemes are limited and crude. Camouflaged under propaganda of universal appeal, it cannot fail to start a whirlpool which will, in time, suck every man, woman and child into moral death."

"You refer to Bolshevism, I suppose? Not a good idea—not good at all. The germ of it has lain in my mind for centuries. I'd suggest that you saunter to the outer gates and quiz the evening's grist. You might happen upon a Red recruit with cheering news."

"The very thing I was about to propose," Old Original made reply, on his way to the door.

The ruler frankly sneered. "Great minds, eh? Are you trying to flatter yourself or me? While you are going, take the wall decorations with you." He included the courtiers

in his gesture. "How many centuries do you obsoletes need to rise to the worst that's in you? Do you suppose for one split-second—mortal time—that I'd work with evil natures, as I have done since that fracas up in Paradise, just for the company of the evilest of them through eternity? By to-morrow I shall have decided what to do with such choice parasites. Out with you, or I'll fit my skeleton key to the trap-door of the bottomless pit and throw you in before your time."

With alacrity which showed their relief at this temporary escape, the seven followed the prime minister through the separating rays of the rear curtain.

Satan appeared to share their relief that they were gone. For a space silence reigned in the throne-room except for the snap of his heels upon the floor and the swish of the royal robe. His reflection in one of the mercurized panels of the side walls caused him to halt. For long he studied his face, then, straightening, appreciated his magnificent outlines. A look of satisfaction cleared the frown of evil affairs from his brow. Lifting his crown, he bowed to the mirror.

A voice from behind the curtain also saluted him:

"'*No wonder that thy heart was lifted up, that thy wisdom was corrupted by reason of thy brightness.*'"

"Step out, caitiff. Be as apparent as your flattery. Why do you linger to spy upon me when I order the court cleared?"

A Balial glare fixed upon the returned minister's ingratiating grin.

"Not to spy upon you, Sire. Rather, to admire you. You certainly are the Boss of Below for looks."

His Highness, never having outlived his first fault of vanity, gave benefit of doubt to the compliment, as also to the glass-like tumbler bewhiskered with crisp-crackling green held toward him.

"I thought Your Majesty's harassed spirit might feel in need of refreshment, so made bold to have this quaff mixed. It is as near as may be like those they have voted too strong for the United States of America, suh. Here you are—a frappé low-bolt!"

Sin proffered both explanation and cup with that irrepressibility which so far had made, but at any moment might break him. With sympathy sips, he watched the sampling of the liquidized current concocted by the first royal bartender, a past-master indeed of the art before it was amended off Forty-second Street and Broadway, New York.

"Get the kick?" he asked, fearing as much as hoping that the julep would fail of its effect.

Satan threw the goblet on the floor, where it snapped and flashed, but did not break.

"If I didn't, you would."

Sin believed him. From experience he had learned the difficulty of gauging the moods of m'lord after a few such applications had filed or smoothed the edges of his tooth-sharp temper. For safety's sake he gave a side glance into the sensitized panel.

"Notice the size of you as compared with me—and I am supposed to be well-developed from my criminal calisthenics."

His Highness frowned—but he also "noticed."

"Where is the value in good looks," he conceded, "if there's none around whom you admire to admire you?"

Old Original was quick to follow the advantage. "A word on that very subject is what I returned to say, a word of condolence and advice."

"*You* offer condolence and advice to *me*?" The King of Evil glared at the most malapert fiend of his kingdom.

"Condolence, Sire, over your state of solitariness. Advice as to how to ease it. From my hurting envy of your appearance I realize one littleness in my largeness. Absolute admiration may endure only where envy may not spring. Why does not Your Majesty seek that companionship which is not born to jealousy? Isn't there a complete assortment of rags and bones and hanks of hair in Gehenna's bargain basement?"

"You suggest for me the companionship of—" Satan paused briefly to sneer—"of a female shade? Don't you suppose, if I cared for the sex, that I'd be running a harem of all nations, stocked with every famed siren, from Helen of Troy forwards and back? You should know by this time,

old weakling, that your spirit in women doesn't appeal to me any more than to mortal profligates."

"But there are the dewy looking souls loitering about the Fields. Why not break the rule that there may be no transference between Elysium and the Lower Land before the Call? Aren't you the exception to all rules? Why not an adventure for Your Excellency, such as we have often seen in the cinemized episodes of modern villains—an abduction, say, of the most visible and fair before the guards can interfere? Don't despise my idea, generated from a conviction that the chief lack in your life is loneliness."

"An angel for me?" Mirthlessly His Highness laughed. "Sir Sin, they bore me limp as a summer-resort collar. To be sure that a she-soul is going to be eternally good is a fraction worse than to be sure that she'll be eternally bad. No, philanderer, you'll have to do better than that. There is not a female, quick or dead, for whose absolute admiration I'd give a plugged nickel."

The click of the door-knocker punctuated this assertion. Satan strode to the throne; replaced his crown; signalled the minister to respond.

Soon Sin bowed low before his Master, a look of evil animation on his face.

"Already the Seven have returned, Sire. They report that a goodly number of bad ones were crowding through the gates. Among others, they interviewed a couple who, they thought, may interest Your Majesty. They await your pleasure without."

"May divert My Majesty from complaint of them, you mean. Yet I suppose that they, as well as you, should have that proverbial last chance due evil intenders. By no means make any diverting shade await my displeasure. Page, bid them enter The Presence."

Royal tolerance fled, however, at sight of the candidates.

"A crippled old soldier and a woman with a suckling babe! It behooves me to find some way of revising the current notion of what constitutes My Majesty's diversion."

He relapsed into silence as the new-comers were half led, half dragged toward the dais by a pair of the scrub-oak

dwarfs who ushered inside the Gehennan gates. By light of the dynamo that is within each soul, they were clothed as in the habiliments they had worn in their late estate on earth, he in a rusty uniform, she in nun's grey. With his crutch the cripple resented their intent to be rough, but his travel-mate stumbled forward without resistance, her head drooped so low that her long, loose hair swaddled the whimpering infant shade in her arms.

The kingly choler increased when, at the steps, she sank as though from exhaustion rather than reverence to her knees. One last, promising glare he shot at Old Original and the seven, then spoke in a voice quiet, yet more dire to those who knew him than any thunder-clap.

"To swoon, madam or miss, is out of date down here. I pray you postpone the attempt for some less sophisticated audience."

Sin, leaning forward from his especial chair just back of the throne, dared to insinuate: "I pray you, Damnity, do not sentence her until you have considered her. There is something exceptional about her. She may have been sent to prove that idea of mine."

Satan scorned to notice the suggestion.

"Come," he ordered the woman soul, "show your passport."

As though from shame, she crumpled against her breast a scarlet slip. Shaking back her hair, she looked up at him.

His Highness, startled, returned her look. He did not heed or hear Sin's gasp of anticipation. He forgot the seven, the pages and the dwarfs. Leaning lower, he looked and looked.

Truly he, who had been the fate of most fair women since Eve, never had beheld one of a face of such appeal.

CHAPTER II

THE multiple-candle glow from the Mephistophelian coat-of-arms lit the girl-soul's features. From a veil that well might have been worn on Earth for mourning, so black was her hair and enveloping, they gleamed as if carved from

Parian marble. The curve of her chin, the fullness of lips blent into faint, downward-traced lines, the tuberose texture of her cheeks, all lent a suggestion of pliancy, even weakness. Above, her classic nose and broad forehead offered contradiction—they were sculped as from a master's inspiration.

Lesser wonders as to the personality behind the marble mask merged into that aroused by her eyes. Coloured like the purpling depths of a midnight sky, they concealed, rather than revealed. From beneath straight brows they gazed forth, not as a hope that is lost in darkness, but as hope resting from its weariness, to rise again at dawn. Over her face they shed a light of mystery that made its beauty negligible—a mystery based neither on courage nor fear, pride nor shame, joy nor dole. They asked what confused the mind and haunted the imagination, that demand of why—*why*—to which only the Creator of souls Himself one day may make satisfactory reply.

Just as intently as the spirit-girl studied the new arbiter of her sorry fate, so was he studying her. At first he did not move. Then the finger-tips of his one hand sought those of the other. As they met, the ruby-red setting of his signet ring discharged a spark.

"The sight of you sounds like some song of Destiny," said he.

"And only Destiny could be accountable for her present plight." The crippled soldier, handling his crutch with the skill of long practice, approached the throne. His one heel clicked against the floor in a salute peculiar to the wars of yester-year. "Might I say a few words, sir, for this young mother? I got to know her well on the awful journey into Shadow Land."

Satan, turning to him, saw that age had not blurred a youthful eagerness in his parchment face and the faded blue of his eyes.

"Why," he scoffed, "should you speak a few words for her, or a couple, or even one—you, a mere piece of a man?"

"That you will know, sir, after you know her. A mere girl she is. Nothing truthful, I'm sure, could be written against her in the records of Earth."

"You evade my question." Royal annoyance over the interruption was turned from him to his sponsors. "Why, you imperfect seven, a one-legged veteran of a past decade?"

The prime minister intervened. "Old One-leg here is not so weak a new idea as he looks. While he has not fought in the latest battles of Earth, he has been absorbed in them, he says, and theoretically knows all there is to be known of modern tactics."

His Highness' shoulders shrugged. "None can say that I am not glad to believe the worst of every man. Has he a passport?"

Aloud he read the soldier-shade's card:

"Samuel Cummings, N.C.O. In youth deserted when battle was on. Changed his name and lost his identity for a time. Later re-enlisted, was wounded in service, but not distinguished. Called from Soldier's Home."

The cripple's free hand brushed one ear, as if forcefully to eject the words. "I deserted, yes. But she lay sick abed, my girl bride, and I loved her better than myself. Afterwards not a man in our company fought more recklessly than Corporal Sam. But we had a saying at the Home that you've got to be conscripted into the army of death. Only cowards volunteer."

"Once a deserter, always one," His Highness made remark. "Don't you see that more important affairs than yours await? Just remember this—no wife is worth deserting a good fight for."

Corporal Sam, with head sagging and shoulders disturbed by more than his crutch, stepped aside. But a wonderful light shone from his blue eyes into the Satanic ones.

"I know," he muttered, "that what made my Mary Gertrude worth deserting for can't ever die. I saw her in the border fields this very evening. She couldn't go on, you see, without me. She had promised to wait around for me until——"

"Silence, old nuisance," Sin advised. "One doesn't mention the Second Call in The Presence."

He need not have feared. His Majesty's attention had

returned to the girl-shade. A long moment he studied her; closed his eyes; quickly opened them to study her again. The puzzlement at first on his features changed to semi-recognition.

"That look in your eyes——what is it, that look? I seem to know you, woman, although I cannot place you. Do you remember having seen me before?"

"I don't think that I have ever seen you. But I've known men on Earth who resembled you."

"It must be that I have trailed you afar, probably at the start of the career that brought you here. Let us see how you're written down in Mors' copy from the book."

Sin transferred the card from her clutch. With characteristic bravado, he read the start of it aloud.

"Dolores Trent, Grief to Men, and bastard babe."

"What's that you say?" With unwonted eagerness, Satan possessed himself of the passport. "That is quite a title—'Grief to Men.' I like it."

He smiled peculiarly while giving his eyes to Earth's verdict of the new-comer, as transcribed from that tome called "Judgments of Men" which is in charge of Mors, keeper of the Great Gates into Shadow Land. From between the two lines of his strong, white teeth, his tongue appeared and smoothed both lips.

The girl-soul, with the equivocal expression of one both fascinated and repulsed, watched him as he read:

"Dolores Trent, known as 'Grief to Men.' A cause of disaster from first breath to last. Her birth caused the death of her mother, whose loss brought her father to ruin. Directly responsible is she held for the wrecked careers of a successful merchant, an eminent Divine, a skilled healer, a previously exemplary millionaire, and an attorney of repute. As a climax, the supreme crime of womanhood is hers—an illegitimate child. Through life she has spread sorrow in her wake. Unto death she carries her murdered ill-begot, a suicide without repentance or appeal."

The King commented: "Æons have come and gone since I have felt surprise. Completely did that look of yours deceive me. Raphael would have altered the face of his Madonna had he first seen yours."

Arising, he stepped from the dais, settled his crown a trifle more to one side and slicked his vandyke with meticulous care. He then approached the cowering figure on the steps.

"It is unseemly that you should remain upon your knees, madam or miss, when many stand who probably are not half so bad as you. Allow me."

Stooping, he lifted her to her feet.

She straightened to face him with a show of bravery.

"I was misunderstood on Earth," she said. "In this existence, I hope for justice."

"Fear not," he assured her. "In Gehenna you shall receive justice, Dolores Trent, as meted by that world which has learned you to its sorrow, and, it would seem, to your own."

"I tell you—I swear to you, sir, that I have done no man willing wrong."

Satan greeted her protest with a punctilious laugh, as though over an attempt at wit.

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief——"

"But you will not punish my baby for my faults? Only look at her, sir. She is too tiny for even the vaguest thought of wrong. To her, at least, be merciful."

"Oh, Hell, be merciful!" Satan mocked her. "That too-late wail has been dinned into my ears until it is a wonder that I can hear you at all. Cheer up. You won't have to part from it—I beg its pardon—*her*. Have you not heard that a child conceived in sin must take his—its chances with her progenitors?"

At the low, protesting cry which escaped from the mother, he laid a hand on her shoulder, then allowed his arm to settle about her, as though measuring her height by his own. His touch appeared repulsive to her. Shuddering, she passed the infant shade to the other arm and stood irresolute, evidently trying to decide how best she might release herself.

A commotion at the door claimed the court's attention. Through the light-striped hangings, slipping from the grip of the pygmies, two comely creatures seemed to float across the throne-room, a youth costumed as a knight and a guileless-looking maid. He, drawing her by the hand, pressed toward the group before the dais. Lithe of body and ardent of eye,

he caught the arm of the King and sought to remove it from about the suppliant's form. As the pursuing dwarfs seized him with their long reach, His Highness found himself looking down into the flower-face of the girl intruder—into eyes shy and fearless as violets at dawn.

"Whom," he inquired, "have we here?"

The minister undertook to announce them. "A pair by the stagy names of Innocentia and Amor. They call themselves guardian spirits, and have a talent, which few share with Your Excellency and myself, of absolute invisibility. They lined up in a most theatrical way beside the wench Dolores outside the door. As they had no passports and did not seem to belong, I sent them back—or thought that I did so."

Satan considered Sin and them. "Where is your sense of humour, Old Original, that *you* explain them to *me*? I can't say that I should have regretted Amor. We have all varieties of him down the Lane of Labours. But Innocentia! You might have appreciated that I seldom get a chance to see her wings flutter or hear her heart beat from fear. Tell me, you two, what madness is driving you?"

"There has been some mistake about the girl Dolores," Amor declared. "Earth has passed another false judgment. Shouldn't I know who have been with her since first she met the father of her child?"

"You refer, I presume, to her husband?"

The love-lad's head threw back in defiance at the jibe. But Innocentia flushed as she took up the defence.

"I have been with our dear Dolores always, more a part of her than the blood in her veins, since that has ceased to flow and I am come with her into Shadow Land. She has heeded all my cautions against the wiles of men. Never once has she offended me."

"More sinned against than sinning, eh?" His Highness plucked an imaginary tear from one eye. "Often as a woman has been damned, have I heard that plea."

"But see for yourself, Sire, how she shrinks from your touch—how she suffers. We pray you, release her."

"Little pest, don't you know that I enjoy defying you?"

Even as he scoffed, however, his clasp of the mother relaxed. He ascended the steps and reseated himself in the throne.

"Innocence and love—certainly a strange companionship," he observed. "Odd that they don't fade out, when they are less material than the dimmest spirit in the inter-world. Shoo them back whence they came, ushers. We must get to the case in hand."

"Oh, I beg you, sir, let them stay!" Dolores interceded. "You'll find that they enter and exit quietly as thoughts of the mind."

"Thoughts of the mind get very much in my way," Satan snapped.

At his show of impatience, Innocentia pressed her lips to the cheeks of the babe. "Do not distress yourself, Dolores dear. It is best that we should disappear. But in Gehenna, as on Earth and in the Fields, we see no gates and acknowledge no commands."

"Always remember," Amor added, "the great love of John Cabot. Send him the strength of your good faith. In your late life it did seem as if he forsook you. But when he comes to the mystery world, he will seek you, never fear."

"I shall remember," Dolores assured them in a low aside. "That night we said our vows, I swore that I believed. Despite appearances, Amor, I do—I *must* believe."

Old Original approached them. "Why unwind these fare-ye-wells when your taxi's waiting? Accept my arm to the door, Miss Innocentia. You look almost overcome."

Waggishly he escorted her out, the while His Majesty's frown lowered to the pygmean pair salaaming before the dais.

As in one whine they put the formal demand: "To what futile labours, O King, shall we consign these recruits?"

Satan shaded his eyes with one hand. He appeared not to be thinking so much as looking. As if from under a blower, the inflammable imagination of him glowed—glowed on Dolores Trent.

The prime minister, on returning, settled in his chair and claimed the keen ear which, through ages past, had considered his suggestions.

"This modern Delilah, Excellency, I consider unique in that she cannot be classed by the naked eye. She is not, so to speak, a type. Might I call your attention to the tact with which she maintains silence, while you——"

"You might not. I detest to have fine bits of the play diagrammed by my seat-mate. Have I or have I not eyes of my own?"

"But, Sire——"

"But the buts! Haven't I paid at least as much admission as you?"

All eyes focused upon the Master, except those of the ancient hypocrite. His settled appreciatively upon her who indeed had distracted the royal resentment from himself. The pause which lapsed he had the temerity to break, although in a vague voice, as if to himself:

"Hell to be lonely . . . Some sympathy soul . . . Boss looker like you . . . Try anything once or twice."

"Try anything once and forever except hoodwinking me."

If Sin's pride was hurt by the King's public rebuke, it must have been salved next moment with the proof that his advice was being found tenable.

His Highness remarked to the court: "As a bad lot, this earthling pair would seem to deserve labours different from any yet devised. Until I decide upon some special form of punishment, I shall keep them in the palace. Dame Dolores comes highly recommended to my ingenuity. That I may observe her vices, I appoint her for the nonce First Royal Entertainer. She shall relate to me those griefs which she has caused on Earth."

His glance veered to the veteran.

"Always have I envied the angels their ability to weep—never have I lived down the ambition to emulate their pietism, with just one tear. Mayhap I shall be moved to that extent by these earth-tales of Grief to Men. I am *so* temperamental. In view of which possibility, Samuel Cummings, I hereby create for you the office of Holder of the Crocodile Tear Bowl to my Majesty. As for the bastard babe——"

Dolores, at his flint-hard gaze, clutched closer the tiny soul of her soul. Intently she awaited his words.

"Don't crucify yourself with maternal fears, my beauty. We are pleased to let the Littlest Devil stick around. Ever notice how the strongest villain has weakness for a brat? Yours is about as young as they come—almost a native, one might say. He will give the palace a homey look."

"She, sir."

"*She!* I beg *its* pardon."

"You are so much kinder than I was led to expect." To his consideration the young mother lifted the radium glow of her gratitude. "From hints I heard at the Mystery Gate, I gathered that you were—that you might be——"

The delicacy of such comment was impressed upon her by the interested expression of its subject. As she paused in confusion, a Balialic smile lightened his countenance.

"Beginning on me already, sweet Grief—and with the old baby-eyed confidence game? Even so, you are different from the rest of the damned Delilahs."

Unexpectedly he clapped his hands. Invective, sarcasm and abuse greeted the courtiers and pages who sprang to receive and execute his orders.

"Get the machinery of this court geared up, will you? Light the snuffed lucifers that are supposed to illuminate my life. Affairs in general are going to be run more according to the ways of Earth, or certain helliots will be put through their third and last degree before their appointed time. You, tell that new chef that I have some few untried torments for him if he does not excel his predecessors to-night. He's to prepare a banquet that will taste as well as look. Dynobasco Sauce for my burnt-out stomach, the mead that sears to wash it down—all the trimmings. And you, tell the head landscape gardener that I want moonlight to-night—gobs of it—and a free play of juice through the Garden of Bad Luck. Have him throw the limit in effect—fountains and foliage and tropical bloom. I want the mistress of royal robes paged at once. Wonderful electrician though she is, she hasn't had a worth-while order since Cleopatra cast me for Anthony the Second in a little domestic drama, whose tragic last act rather overbalanced the light lines of the start. We shall see what her genius at fabric effects can do for this

trail-worn lady. Remind her of how Shakespeare once remarked : ' Glad rags don't spoil the work of any tragedienne.' "

The crook of a royal finger brought Old Original to his side.

" Sin, I wish you personally to see to the selection of a suitable tear-bowl. Take care that it is polished. Our electro-silver plate tarnishes so quickly from its own heat. And make sure that it doesn't leak. My first crocodile tear must be preserved—a glittering trophy to adorn the filet of m'lady Grief. Now begone, all of you. The biggest little séance since Creation is going to commence to-night."

Alone, to his reflection in the mirror, he telepathed :

" I know that she is different because of the different effect on me. Because I don't doubt that she's bad, I don't dislike her looking good. She *is* unique, this Dame Dolores. I may be able to use her. Should I approve her method in those troubles she caused on Earth, I might show her some larger responsibilities."

Through the seven courses of that most remarkable of feasts, the spirit-girl Dolores exerted herself to please their Satanic host, for the sake of her babe if not of herself. Splendid beyond words was his appearance, from his scintillant crown to the hem of a mantle charged to imitate iridescent metal cloth. Corporal Sam Cummings she had scarcely recognized, so changed was he by the steel-scaled costume of an old-time knight in which he came arrayed, a veritable " armour of light."

Without vanity, she appreciated the kindly soldier-soul's gasp at first sight of her, having herself been surprised by the achievement of the mistress of robes.

A twist of green flame bound her hair and suspended one large drop, like an emerald of great price, low upon her brow. The rays of her body garment clung close, representing a material sewn through with threads of gold. This fell only to her pearl-roped ankles, but a long cloak of translucent green waved behind her when she moved, like the following billows of the sea.

Her beauty she had learned to deplore. To-night she

feared it. Something worse than admiration had shone in the lurid gaze of the prime minister and lesser courtier demons, something disturbing in the silent, critical inspection of His Highness.

Gracious enough had been Satan's manner. Not until he sampled the last course of the delusive seven did his irritation break bounds. He demanded the presence of the first chef.

"What was my promise if you didn't concoct something that I could taste?" he demanded of that unworthy. "Why do you suppose I had you heat-tormented to suicide in the *Brillon* kitchens in Paris, if I didn't expect you to do better by me gastronomically than your predecessors? I have been improvising tortures for cook-soul failures for more centuries than the blades of near-grass used to tint this pistache ice. Bah, heats me to look at it! Soon as I can replace you, into the hole for Traitors to Mothers you drop."

The wretch wrung his hands. "Not there, Your Majesty! I loved my *mère*. And is not my present labour futile enough? Almost do I despair of tempting the palate of an immortal, with nothing but chimeras as ingredients—with flour of the bleached dust of hopes and paprika, and baking-powder of imaginary ground brick or brimstone."

"I do not grant that your labour is futile," Satan snapped. "Surely you'll agree that the Ruler of Greater Gehenna deserves the Epicurean joys afforded gluttonous nobodies of Earth? I want to *eat*, I tell you. Of course, I am more or less immaterial. Every soul in Shadow Land is, the newcomers less, the old-timers more. But the appetites of Earth appeal more to me than the self-sufficiency of the angels. I intend to have them—and to have them satisfied. If by to-morrow you have not risen to the concoction of something to tempt me, into the hole for Traitors to——"

With what sincerity she could assume, Dolores interposed. "I am sure I never tasted a more delicious pasty."

"Is that true? Can you *taste* it?"

Satan's gaze was upon her with the questions, his expression more than wontedly repulsive from greed. Then wrath at her caught him.

" Liars are to be commended in a bad cause, but not *pitiers* ! You must conquer such impulses. Acknowledge that you have experienced only the vaguest reminiscence of taste. Come, let us leave this farce of a feast. I have chosen my Chamber of Chance as the most fit setting for your tale of the game of life. Lady champion of griefs, precede me."

He pushed back from the table. The attendants scrambled after his example. The head butler turned Dolores' chair. She found herself sweeping past the demon parasites, then past His Majesty, standing with head bent and hand on heart, a derisive smile upon his face. A page, at a gesture of the King, gathered up the phosphorescent billows of her mantle.

She fell into the rhythm of certain strains of music which were playing a dim, yet definite march of the dead. No ocean ever sobbed more sympathetic plaint. No snarl of fife or beat of drum ever timed sterner step. The music between two spheres—had Handel heard it in his dream of Saul ?

The Royal Entertainer was placed in the strongest light at a faro table which centred a room black-hung and artistically dimmed for the occasion. Satan sat opposite as a mere auditor, his eyes glowing like lit lamps from the shadow.

" A hint or two or three before you begin," said he. " Remember that the story's the thing. If it doesn't grip, aside from the fact that *you* are telling it, you'll have failed in your art. You've read some of the old-fashioned French novels, I hope ? "

" Oh yes, Sire, and in the original. My father was a translator and taught me to read in several languages, French, Russian, Spanish——"

" Doesn't all that come in the story ? Don't insult our intelligence with repetitions. Try to emulate the speed of modern fictionists, with the—shall we say the slow-mindedness of the old ? And leave out the asterisks. We who have crossed into Mystery Land have every right to know what's behind the stars."

" You mean——" she faltered.

" In brief, this : give us a tale with style, but all passages that should be expurgated must be left in."

Dolores, confused rather than enlightened by these specifications, essayed her earth-life story with what sprightliness she might.

"You know New York City?"

"Do I know New York—I who invented it?"

Her start was fortuitous; although not intended to be humorous, it won the tribute of a chuckle from him at the head of the narrow monk table.

"Since you know New York, King Satan——"

"Call me Pluto," suggested he. "It is my friendliest name."

"King Pluto"—she gave him a smileless nod of agreement—"you doubtless have heard of Harlem flats?"

Again he chuckled. "Some of our best little badger games, jealousies, murders and other such trivial offences have been conceived and executed in Harlem flats. Eh, Old Original? We call them 'incubators of discontent.' I have visited a few in person on special occasions, although generally one of the under-demons proves bad enough to start the regular Harlem crimes. The *Boulevard des Capucines*, Piccadilly, *Unter den Linden*, *the Corso*, and a narrow street called Wall, are more usual haunts of mine, offering, as they do, larger opportunities. But this side-issuance is against the rules. Assume that I am fairly well acquainted with the cubbies of modern cliff-dwellers."

"They named me 'Grief to Men,' yet I have not meant to be so. To explain how the cruel title came to be forced upon me, I must begin in a Harlem flat at about my nineteenth year."

With the tremors of a spent swimmer forced to greater effort against the tide, Dolores breasted her tale. Through that evening's recital and through those of subsequent evenings, she sought to make of herself a mere entertainer, to remember the "style" demanded, as learned from the border-line literature of the several tongues at her command, to conquer her reluctance and lay bare the facts which had been deemed worthy of so much space in the newspapers of Earth—for the sake of those whom indirectly she was protecting, to tell her tale with aptitude as impersonal as though its subject were not herself.

Yet in the telling came moments when her continuity broke, when her desperate attempt was abandoned in something more convincing than "style." Conquered by emotions which had come with her from the mortal world to this strange beyond—emotions of reverence, of love, of passion, of shame—she would fall silent, unable to proceed. At such times her hands would shield her eyes, while the shudders of a modest spirit would plead for reprieve; her head would droop until her breast touched the board; her lips refuse for a space to obey her will to divert.

Fortunately His Excellency, far from disapproving such violations of the rules which he had imposed, appeared to regard them as superstrokes of a talent patent from the start. They added to the reality of the tale, prolonged suspense, and multiplied his enjoyment in her sufferings. To him, prone to delight in the inherent worst of devils and of men, the words she could not force herself to utter often meant more than those which had fallen from her lips.

Again, when his own impatience, increased by that of the demon audience, stripped bare her soul and lashed her, with malevolent threats, into renewed effort, he would chortle aloud from satisfaction in his mental degeneracy.

From his infinite fund of information regarding persons of importance whose trails had crossed the girl-soul's own, he was frequently able to furnish facts regarding others when, at times, she failed.

The earth-story of Dolores Trent, free in version and filled in from the super-supply of Satanic intelligence, was as follows.

CHAPTER III

CLOSE upon five o'clock the decrepit vehicle which, with a dingy hearse, had formed the funeral cortège of Trevor Trent, creaked to a stop. The entrance to the Heartsease Apartments gaped wide, just as it had gaped a few hours earlier when the remains of the wastrel had passed through for the last time. The relic of a Jehu, in crinkled topper and faded blue livery sans buttons, lowered rheumatically from his seat

on the box. Adjusting his soiled dickey, mainstay of a celluloid collar and green tie, he threw open the door with what might have been taken for extra ceremony, had he not verbally urged his passengers to hurry, lest he miss the hot free-lunch which, with the weak prohibition time " suds " that washed it down, was the most pleasurable event of his day,

Those who alighted stood a moment in regretful silence—two typical Harlem matrons, one with a child in arms, both with offspring attached like lead weights to their skirts. Between them was the girl whom they were seeing to-day, through the goggles of sensation, in the star rôle of chief mourner.

" Pore thing—pore young thing ! "

Their tears, more or less sincere, vied with those of the dripping heavens, although not tears for Trevor Trent. Indeed, they who had known his life for the past seventeen years had no apologies, even to the angels, for omitting to weep over his demise. Their toil-dulled compassion went out in this loneliest moment that succeeds a death to the orphaned daughter, who, hitherto, had been a detached unit in their congested midst. A substantial escort, they ushered her up the steps, unheeding the querulous welcome of the young hopefuls left at home.

" Was it a long, good joggly ride, ma ? "

" You mighta tooken us along."

" Can *I* go next time anybody dies ? 'Tain't fair baby gets all the fun."

Inside the door, the manner that belonged to an occasion was unceremoniously doffed. Sympathy along this particular block of the East One-Hundreds never interfered with life's practicalities. Dolores Trent received no invitations to sup with her neighbours—she expected none, since any superfluous scraps would be served for breakfast.

Uneasy in the emptiness of the three rooms which for so long had represented home to her, she settled at the oak desk beside the window, with intent of searching the close-printed Want columns of an evening paper. But at first she could not see to read.

In this chair her father had struggled over the translations from which their livelihood had been eked in those better

moments when the drug to which he was addicted would permit him to work. That, of course, was before he had lost the position through inaccuracies which made the firm intolerant of trying her as substitute. In the corner to the right squatted the couch upon which he had wasted into that pallid, unresponsive thing so lately consigned to the ground, despite her terrified efforts to stay his departure and to recall him, once he had gone. How strange, how confusing it was to be alone, like a flower cut from its bush and thrown to the wind! It seemed as though she, too, must wither and die.

Over him toward the last had come a change which already was dear to her memory. Always gentle with her, intermittently zealous in an ambition to train her mind for some worthwhile future, he had become obsessed by an anxiety over her which dulled him to the crave for poppy paste, hitherto his controlling love and hate. It was something to remember that, improvident though he had been in life, paupered though he was leaving her, his distress over her fate in these last days had conquered his desire for the drug. In the dusk, his last words seemed again to rasp in her ears.

"You have beauty and innocence, my girl. Please God! a good young love may protect you on your way."

Although her eyes burned, no tears relieved them. Although her heart near burst with longing to assure him how, above other children, she had been grateful for his affection, no whisper passed her lips. She could not reach him now. Merely pitiful was her regret over the diffidence which had kept her from telling him that, from her earliest understanding, she had recognized his right to resent her; had appreciated, on that very account, his tolerance.

But she must not regret; that would weaken her when most she needed strength. Had she not done the best she could? In her life-long defence of his habit, in the protectorate over him which had been her chief concern from childhood to this early maturity, had she not shown him that she worshipped him for forgiving the crime she had committed in being born—in making that brutal exaction of a life for a life?

The poppy paste she never had criticized, realizing that it had entered his life at the beginning of her own, when the young

mother who had died to give her birth lay stark, for the first time unresponsive to his adoration. On that first night of her existence, as often he had told her, he had chosen her name as a sort of epitaph. Grief. . . . Grief. . . . That was what she had meant to him.

His improvidence she could not condemn, remembering the brilliant career which, before her advent, had appeared to be opening before him. Despite her lonely childhood, despite the endurance which had filled her time in lieu of laughter and play, she was glad now that always she had known. With the full hurt of her heart she hoped that, if he had not understood in life, he knew to-night that always—always—she had known.

Darkness had taken possession of the room.

A thought that darkness possessed her prospects also caused her to light the gas. She must not stumble into the future. She must cease looking backward; must turn and face forward. Determinedly she settled to the "Help Wanted" columns, a hopeful array.

However, as she read through one after another of the advertisements, down one column and up the next, the confidence inspired by their numbers decreased. She had not expected at once to sight an opportunity in which she might utilize the somewhat haphazard learning with which she was equipped. But she had hoped for something—*something* she could do.

And then:

> WANTED—Pretty young girl of innocent type. No experience necessary. Good pay to right person. Apply Wednesday, 10.30 a.m., to VINCENT SEFF, —— Fifth Avenue.

In small type, with the reserve of opportunity, it stood out from the rest. Dolores re-read it. "No experience necessary." That was the kindest thing said to her since the cry of her father's late-born anxiety: "You have beauty and innocence, my girl." The advertisement seemed addressed to her.

As if in period to or amusement over her conclusions, there sounded a gurgle from the gas meter. The flame flickered; sputtered; went out. Funerals, even in the East One-

Hundreds, are expensive, and the slot of the meter never would have mistaken the single five-cent piece remaining in her purse for the quarter that was its exaction. In darkness Dolores retired.

As she lay in her narrow white-iron bed, she saw in the gloom, even more clearly than under the jet, that the want-ad. was meant for her. The signature had possessed, from first glance, a familiar look. Vincent Seff . . . Vincent Seff . . . could she have heard that name before ?

With the first ray of gratuitous daylight, recognition flooded her mind. Of course ! Why shouldn't it look familiar, that name ? Often had she glanced at it when waiting around the corner to safeguard her father home from the publishing house. In letters of brass, hammered into an ebony plate, it identified the most alluring windows along that highway of lures :

VINCENT SEFF
LINGERIE

So there was work to be had at " good pay " handling those costly, cobwebby under-garments which she, although widely separated from them by circumstances, had paused passionately to admire. So the proprietor of that house of dear delights wished to employ her, " without experience," if only she proved pretty and innocent enough !

Even after dawn " 10.30 a.m." seemed far distant. But there was much to do toward vacating the flat. Already the landlord had given her grace of three days and the new tenants were " moving in." Everything of value had gone to the pawnbroker over on Lenox Avenue. The remnant of furniture would be called for during the forenoon by the junk man who had advanced her money for the funeral.

The Trevor Trent alligator suit-case, its original claims to distinction contested by the years, she had retained for her wardrobe and keepsakes. This, when packed, she carried across the hall and left, " to be called for," with one of yesterday's emergency mourners. After neatly sweeping the floors as a wordless return for the un-landlordly lenience shown her, she stood for one last moment on the threshold of the living-room. Although no sound escaped her, there rose from

heart to quivering lips the wail of the young animal bereft at once of parent and home.

Down at the corner a subway entrance attracted her. The estate of Trevor Trent was closed, his last obligation honourably met. In the purse of his sole heir lay her legacy, enough to carry her swiftly and at ease to the neighbourhood of her promised employment—promised to her by Vincent Seff. She took out the lone coin and started for the entrance.

An old friend, the Italian fruiterer, who yesterday had eyed her with the impressionability of his race, stopped her to press into her hand a luscious-looking, out-of-season nectarine. Dolores tried to thank him, but choked on the words. She decided to walk down town. Without a clink, her nickel slid into the coin-box at the corner of his cart, as if fearful of being considered payment for this and other of his kindnesses since her little girlhood. Dolores, too, was fearful. She hoped the flush on her wontedly pale face had not made him suspect. At the corner she glanced back. The old friend waved to her. Happily he had not heard, had not seen.

Ten-fifteen.

Somewhat winded, she hurried her already stiff pace at the warning of the church-tower clock on the cross-street just above the lingerie establishment. The outer doors were wide open, and through the inner ones of plate glass she could see gracefully dressed women assistants shaking out and arranging their flimsy wares with a nice regard for effect. As yet there appeared to be no customers. But then, as Dolores reminded herself, Vincent Seff's was an ultra-fashionable shop. The fine ladies destined to wear his creations scarcely would be stirring beneath their satin and eider-down at ten-fifteen a.m.

But even Father Time could not bully her into entering at once. She found herself palpitating with the uneasiness of one who, for the first time, offers her services for wage. Three times she approached the door before her courage bore her through.

Down the aisle a fashion-plate of a man stepped out to meet her.

"May I direct mam'selle?" asked he, in unctuous voice.

On realizing that she had been taken for a customer, Dolores' spirits lifted. She glanced hopefully down at her threadbare

blue serge suit. That daybreak pressing must have rejuvenated it more than she had thought.

"I came in answer to this." She produced the want-ad.

Insult was added to the shop-walker's obvious sense of injury when a woman assistant, elaborately coiffed, made comment from the nearest counter:

"You might have guessed her as the one last victim for Juke Seff's slaughter of innocents."

His face twisted in the very process of smiling. However, he managed—just in time—to frown.

"One flight up," he said curtly to Dolores. "Turn to the right and——"

"To the wrong, deary," corrected the assistant. "Then go away, 'way back and down, down, *down*."

Following directions, Dolores found herself in a large room which appeared to be a modified sort of office, furnished in grey wicker, with hangings of grey and purple chintz. As every chair and settee was occupied, she backed to the wall near the door. Surprised to see how many applicants had preceded her, she began to make comparisons.

Every shade of complexion, from ash blonde to raven-brunette was represented. Glancing among them, she might have envied some their loveliness and fashionable clothes, had she not so sincerely admired them. Like a flower garden the company looked and smelled, every girl contributing her favourite colour and perfume of sachet or extract to the steam-heated air.

With all her appreciation, Dolores' heart grew heavy. Gone was her hope in the quiet distinction of her felt sailor hat, gone her assurance that the advertisement was the sign-board of Fate. Closer to the wall she shrank, when, precisely at half-after-ten, Vincent Seff himself entered the room.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was no mistaking the man. None less than the owner of the shop would enter with that assured step, and glance among them with that odd mixture of æsthetic

distaste, yet business interest. His manner announced that they were "goods" to him.

Seff was a man of certain attractions, somewhere in the later thirties. Clothed in semi-belted homespun, his lines were so defined as to suggest stays beneath. He was of medium height, clean-shaved, and almost pallid of face. His brown hair he wore somewhat tousled, probably to hide its scantiness over the crown.

By the time he had reached the centre of the room, the girls had straightened and begun to smile and chatter—all, perhaps, except Dolores Trent. She watched him with the detached interest of her dead hope.

Halting, he threw up his delicate hands in an affectation of bewilderment.

"Oh, my dears!" he exclaimed, but in a voice lacking animation, "I should not have believed that there was so much innocence in Gotham. Really, I am all but overcome."

Despite the assertion, his eyes swept this corner and that.

"Would that I needed an army of innocents instead of the one superlative!" He stepped to the open door on the right. "Mrs. Hutton!" There was a click in his voice.

"Kindly be my board of elimination, Mary," he instructed the handsome, white-haired woman who responded. "This galaxy of guilelessness is too much for little Vin. My discrimination is blinded, my business shrewdness reels, my senses—— Yes, yes, I know that the lord of lingerie should not have 'em—senses. But what can a mere man do?" He laid one arm about her shoulders and leaned against her, as if for support.

"Merer than man," she said, and as though from dislike, she shrugged him off.

"Jealous again, dear heart?"

Although he had smiled with the question, her answer made him flush.

"A sensible woman isn't jealous of a thought."

"Be good enough, by processes of detection best known to your sex," he instructed her more briskly, "to reduce this bevy to five of the most natural. I'll see them in the studio."

Something additional he murmured into her ear.

She returned him a strange look.

" In twenty minutes I'll show in the five," said she competently.

The shopman addressed the array of applicants. " You will understand, young and pretty creatures, that refusal implies no aspersion, either upon your looks, or, shall I say, upon your artful effect of artlessness. Unfortunately the house of Seff can utilize but one of you, and stern business commands the selection of her best suited to our particular needs. Thanks for the sight of each and all."

With a winning smile, generally distributed, he bowed low, backed to the chintz-curtained doorway through which he had entered, and disappeared into what, evidently, was the studio.

Not once had his glance paused in the vicinity of Dolores Trent. She, in complete reversal of last night's concept of a Fate especially interested in herself, lingered only to watch proceedings.

The softer lines which had made Mrs. Hutton's face attractive disappeared with her employer. Sentiment evidently was to have no place in these " processes of detection best known to her sex." She formed the seventy-odd applicants in lines, before which she walked, looking each closely in the face.

" Girls wearing rouge to this side of the room."

No one moved. With woman's headiest hope, each evidently relied upon the artistry of her make-up.

Mary Hutton again started along the lines. Authoritatively she tapped this rose-blush blonde and that brilliant brunette.

To one who protested that she would not know how to rouge : " You don't need to tell me, my dear, anything self-evident. You shouldn't put so much in the centre of your cheeks. Natural colour *spreads*. That's the first lesson I give our salesgirls. Start with a dab on the chin, next a suggestion on your forehead between the eyes, then quite a bit on the lobes of the ears, where all colour starts. Only with these high spots tinted to guide you, can you hope for a natural effect. When you're going out, ask for my booklet, ' If You Must Rouge, Rouge Right.' They'll give you a copy free. Now, please, girls over twenty, fall out ! "

Again hesitation, reproaches and complaints, were met with uncompromising firmness.

Dolores never understood how it happened, for long since she had given up. She made no plea to Mrs. Hutton, nor did Mrs. Hutton say anything in particular to her. In fact, if the forewoman showed any notice of her other than of an automaton, it appeared to be dislike, not approval. Yet, at the last, after the most impersonal of appraisals, she found herself among the fittest five. As one, they were waved between the curtains of grey and lavender chintz.

The " studio " might have been milady's boudoir. Of violet velvet were the carpets and hangings. The spindly Hepplewhite furniture wore modulated tapestry. There was bric-à-brac scattered about. On the walls hung etchings.

Vincent Seff had removed his homespun coat for a smoking jacket of embroidered lavender silk, with which the more delicate tone of his shirt and tie blended satisfyingly. He did not rise as they entered ; indeed, he did not glance up for several minutes afterward. He was lolling upon a *chaise longue*, at work over a drawing—some garment design, presumably, as he kept glancing at a rack beside him over which hung several strips of vari-tinted fabrics.

With a sigh of reluctance he laid down the drawing-board, selected a cigarette from a gold cigarette case, and leisurely lighted it. Only after several deep inhalations did he yield his attention to the nervous bevy ranged before him. Pleasure covered the regret on his face as he surveyed them. He sat straight ; studied them one by one.

" This is cruel—the most exquisite cruelty ! " Aloud came exclamation at last.

He reconsidered the stuffs on the rack. Leaning over, he touched them.

" Beautiful, aren't they ? Surely the possession and feel of such things should be enough—enough."

His gaze, again shifting, fixed upon the pansy eyes of a silver blonde whom, from the first, Dolores had admired most.

" Come closer, Dresden shepherdess," he invited.

It was all over, settled, Dolores thought. Those defeated should be the last to deny the *petite* creature's claim to election,

so soft were the curves of her figure, so alluring her tints of white, pink, blue and palest gold.

"Sorry to seem to disparage you, who deserve a kinder fate," Seff was saying. "You can see at a glance that your complexion and hair are too indefinite to make for contrast with these *crêpes*. Perhaps one day, for some other purpose——"

His voice ebbed as does an outgoing tide. His attention veered to the girl next in line, the most striking of the natural brunettes from the outer room.

"My, my, but you are a luscious thing—a lovely, luscious thing!" Seff's delicate finger-tips touched together sensitively. "I wish you to understand that, personally, I like you red-blooded, dark ones—prefer you, in fact. But you are too colourful for our present need. You'd make this flesh pink look ashen. Awfully sorry, my dear. A thousand thanks for the look at you. As for you, lithe gazelle——"

The manner of his preface somehow foretold the fate of the tall, willowy girl with nut-brown hair, fleeting flushes, and eyes like limpid pools, whom he next considered.

Dolores' heart ached for the three thus gently dismissed. She knew just how they felt. She would be the fourth to go. Certainly, if they could not qualify, she should not feel disappointment or offence. Except that her situation was so desperate——

"Go over to my friend Feldtbaum," Seff continued. "See if he can find a place for you in one of his roof shows. He wants just the effect of spotless virtue which you give out—likes it for punch. Somehow, for my purpose, you overlook the part. And the next girl—she won't do at all."

His voice had sharpened.

Dolores almost leapt from the group, both hands hard pressed against her heart to still its beat.

"Not you," said the artist-merchant. "I'm speaking to the fourth of you. Pretty face, young, innocent enough, but too much bust—more like a matron. What I want to-day is—how shall I express it?—the spirit of modest allurement. You understand, each of you four, why you won't do? I am so sorry. I sincerely thank you. Good morning."

Dazed was she who watched them go. Her one definite thought was of the gas meter. How had it known when to click off last night—how been even more sure than she that the advertisement had been written for her ?

" What am I to call you ? " asked Vincent Seff when they were alone.

" Dolores Trent is my name, sir."

" Dolores ? A sad little name. And you look to be a sad little dame, sad and mysterious. That's what gets me and all the rest—mystery. Tell me "—his eyes lifted quizzically—" was it your own idea to carry that symbol ? "

" You mean this—this nectarine ? An old friend gave it to me as I was leaving home."

Dolores realized with negligent surprise that the fruiterer's good-bye gift was still clasped in one of her hands.

" A real nectarine, is it ? I supposed it was artificial—meant to be sort of emblematic—smooth, cool, not overripe, yet with suggestions of pungency, like, for instance, yourself. That was too much to expect, eh ? "

" Yes, sir, it was," she admitted.

He continued to study her. " Since you don't claim subtlety, perhaps I'd better confess that you were selected before I went into the outer room. I looked over the flock through the curtain."

" You—you did ? "

" Yes, and advised Mrs. Hutton not to overlook you."

" Then why——"

" Why didn't I put the rest out of their misery at once ? Because I am said to be kind-hearted. The name of being kind-hearted saves me money in getting employees. Then, too, my business has taught me to flatter all women, rather than offend them. Do you mind taking off your jacket, Dolores ? "

She answered by compliance.

Seff arose and stood for a moment, stooping to peer into her face. One hand he clasped around her right forearm and slid it up to her shoulder, evidently measuring its proportions. Then he tried the firmness of her busts.

Dolores did not like this, although she did not say so. She

swallowed against a pressure in her throat, and longed for her father as she had not longed hitherto. For the first time she lifted her eyes to his.

He flushed, and in another moment removed his hands. He showed, however, his pleasure that, from the eyes of the applicant, had looked the attribute which was the chief stipulation of his advertisement.

"You are not developed as you might be, but you may do better on that very account," he said, his manner professional. "There's a reason. I am sure we shall be good friends."

"I hope that I shall be able to suit you."

"No doubt of that."

"I—I mean that I shall be able to do the work."

"No doubt of that," he repeated.

After helping her into the serge coat, he stood off in general contemplation of her, a pucker between his brows.

"Now, I don't wish to hurt your feelings, Dolores, but you'll have to dress better right from the start. You don't care if I get down to business? Your salary will be twenty-five dollars a week for the present. Later, if you fulfil my expectations and don't dun me, I'll probably raise it. I am going to pay you a week in advance and make you an expense allowance of one hundred dollars. I, of course, pay for any extra clothes I order. I want you to go out and make two purchases—first, one full-sized lunch, of which you look in need; second, a new outfit. I shall not dictate that your suit be grey, the colour we affect in the store. But I advise that it be quite plain, something along the lines of what you have on, only of better material. Don't scrimp in the quality, will you?"

"I won't," she promised.

Drawing a leather folder from his breast pocket, Seff sorted out six twenties and one five-dollar bill and handed them to her.

Dolores took them, not knowing what to say. One hundred and twenty-five dollars!

"You see that I trust you. Take the rest of to-day and the early part of to-morrow to get yourself togged out," he further advised. "You may report to me here around noontime. I'll explain then what your duties will be. Everything satisfactory?"

"I wish I could thank you," Dolores murmured, as she stood waiting for him to turn the knob of the door.

"You can," he said in his crisp way. "Give me the symbol."

"The—this nectarine?"

"Yes. I want to sip it."

She glanced up to see if he could be joking. But evidently he was not. His eyes met hers, blue and serious as a child's. Yet she felt vaguely disturbed to notice that, as he looked, the tip of his tongue appeared from between his teeth and moistened both lips.

At once she gave him the nectarine. She was glad—so very glad—that she had something he wanted to give him. She told him so.

"You are, eh?"

He said no more to her by way of thanks. But she caught several words of what he added, as if to himself:

"Sight, touch, the thought of taste. All—that is all."

He did not answer when she bade him good-bye. With an absorbed look, he was turning the nectarine about in his fingertips. He seemed in no hurry to bite into it.

To the best of her judgment, Dolores followed the instructions of her first employer. She changed the five-dollar bill in the purchase of luncheon, for she was, indeed, very hungry. Even the reminder that she now must eat all her meals alone, did not dull the edge of her appetite. It did, however, decide that the colour of her new suit should be black—the only sign she might make of the desolation in her heart. Mr. Seff might not like it. Still he had said that he was "kind-hearted." He would condone when he understood. It should have the "quality" which had been his one proviso—all the quality she could pay for, after she had deducted a week's room-rent in advance and a sufficient sum for food and incidentals.

The room she sought first, as the less particular purchase and found easily—a clean bedroom in the "refined adult" district of the middle West Forties. The lesser details of her "outfit"—a hat, gloves, stockings and shoes—she acquired one by one. The suit she did not decide upon until ten o'clock the next morning, when, conscious of the clock hands and the

obligations of good taste thrust upon her, she exchanged her full residue for a tailor-made Duvetyn, reduced in price, according to hearsay in the sample shop, because of its " trying simplicity." Holding her own opinion superior to the many other ambitious things which the saleswoman said about it, Dolores honestly felt that it was a suit whose distinction of cut might offset, in Mr. Seff's opinion, its sombre hue.

Attired in its unpretentious luxury, her hair done low on her neck, as her father had liked it best, beneath her new toque, she reported at eleven o'clock in the studio.

It was at this point in the girl-shade's recital, that she tore her eyes from the expectant smile of Satan the First and Last; covered her face from the hot gaze of others of her demon audience; allowed her sprightly utterance to lapse into shuddered lament.

" Oh, if I had known, if I had dreamed what I had been paid-in-advance to do! If I could have understood in time the stare of the shop-walker or the assistant's reference to ' the Juke Seff's slaughter of innocents ' ! But the hundred dollars was spent and he showed only surprise at my dismay. I begged him to let me work out the money in some other department of the store. But he said that even scrubbing required experience. He had nothing else for a girl without references to do."

The King scowled. " You really have diverted me so far, but your narrative style has slumped. It is an old trick, fair fiend, that of pricking up the interest with exclamation points."

" Hasn't even a damned woman a right to some sacred feelings ? " Sin interposed.

" Even so, this is no confessional and I am no priest. Queer that my attention was never called to this lingerie lord. He seems to be one of my own sort."

As Dolores forced herself to look again at His Majesty, she appreciated why his habit of wiping both lips with the tip of his tongue had seemed odiously familiar.

" Have we no film in the Picture Storage Houses of the machinations of one Vincent Seff ? " With a threat in his voice, Satan turned on the prime minister.

Sin met the implication with bravado. "Seff is only a shopkeeper, Your Highness, a corking bad fellow, I know, but not of special importance. Our storage space is overcrowded now with films of far worse than he."

Satan's frown blackened. "He sounds promising to me. Should our Old Original be found guilty of another crime of omission—— However, we are to hear more of Seff and your maiden effort, are we not, sweet Grief? Pray proceed, cutting out those alack-and-alas passages. We shall assume that you were as innocent as your employer's requirement at high noon of that fateful day. It is a reasonable assumption that everybody *is* innocent in life's a.m., eh? At times I take to pitying even myself for my state of innocuous naughtiness before that little set-to with the Great-I-Am. Come now, the tale—and see that you give us the worst of it!"

CHAPTER V

FROM facts learned later Dolores was able at this point to shift the view-point of her earth story from performer to audience. The incidents of that first morning's payment in service of her financial debt she presented through the eyes of John Calvin Cabot, sole scion of a seventh generation of New Yorkers, and a financier who, through his inherent aversion to idleness, was rated many times a millionaire.

The Cabots were late motoring down town, having been detained at their Upper Fifth Avenue home by a domestic contretemps. The distress of it still hardened the lines of the man's somewhat grim-featured face. Through the downward rush of many blocks, he pondered the first personal favour he had considered asking his wife in years.

"Catherine," he said at last, "I wish you'd come with me to some toy-shop and help in the selection."

Catherine Cabot glanced into the limousine mirror, hung near the vase of her favourite yellow orchids, "to double," as she put it, their beauty. She looked a good deal like the orchids, golden-haired, delicate of outline, fragile of texture,

flower-eyed. John glanced into the mirror, too, rather than straight at her. During their ten years together he had come to prefer the reflection of his wife to the original. It was softer.

"My day is so full. John, order any toys you like. Have them sent by special messenger."

"You don't get my idea, Catherine. Jack would be touched, and perhaps punished more than in any other way for his outbreak this morning, if you selected a birthday present for him yourself."

"Can't you tell him that I did, anyhow?"

"I could, yes. But I won't. I expected that you'd suggest that lie."

"*John!* I sometimes think that Jackie must have inherited his viciousness straight from you."

A moment the man considered this effective, if unconvincing reproach of the mother of his only child.

"I wish you could feel some of my indignation over that statement," he made quiet comment. "Now and then you have caprices for the most unique frankness I have ever noticed in a woman. Tell me, do you have no yearnings whatever over our unfortunate boy?"

She looked interested, as if at a compliment.

"I pride myself on my frankness. Of course any woman has a natural affection for her own child. But, as you know, I am a beauty lover. It is not my fault that I can't love Jack as I should if he looked like me or even you."

"Perhaps, Catherine, he inherited something from you. Perhaps he also is a beauty lover. Could you consider the suggestion that the 'viciousness' you accredit to me may be in him an extreme case of nerves—of a suffering over his deformity older than you'd expect at eight years?"

The woman was thumbing the pages of her morocco-bound engagement book and omitted to reply.

With a sadness too complete for contempt, he added: "You often have wondered where Jack's ugliness comes from. I'll tell you—from the ill-favoured spirit of our marriage."

Catherine looked startled. Then she looked indignant.

After that, with a sigh of long-sufferance, she looked very sweet.

In a voice gentle as his had been she replied—"Since you take my refusal so hard as to resort to your occasional marital recriminations, *dear* John, I'll yield. I will go with you to the toy-shop, although probably I'll have to break a luncheon engagement in consequence. You can't say that I am unwilling to do my part. Just a minute until I see what I have on to-day."

Soon and coaxingly she glanced up at him. Her upper lip shortened over mouse-like teeth which gleamed, sharp and white, between their crimson guards. Even with the husband who claimed to know her, Catherine never was chary of ingenuous, confiding smiles.

"It's your turn to make a concession. On our way to the toy-shop, step in with me at a showing of underwear at Seff's. It lasts only from twelve to one, and I'll miss it if I go farther down town. Even puritanical you may be amused. Seff is rather sensational in his advertising, but he does import lovely things. Here is the invitation for the latest of his shows. Do you mind?"

She handed him a card, engraved and dictioned in the very best form. She looked rather pleased than otherwise at the manner of her husband's consent.

"How like you, Catherine, to make your concessions C.O.D.! For Jack's sake, I shall try not to 'mind.'"

A flutter of interest greeted the Cabots' appearance on the top floor of the lingerie establishment, for no more discussed pair trod the made-up scenery of the ways and by-ways of Gotham's rich.

Catherine, despite the irregularity of that short upper lip and the tortured, metallic brilliancy of the yellow of her hair, and the demand for public notice made by her clothes, was often pronounced the most beautiful matron "among those present"; at least, she was always conspicuous. To-day her perquisitory air of excelling even her splendid mink coat won her distinction in the fashionable gathering of many women and a few men.

John—as his wife was given to explaining—she had mar-

ried for his looks. She called him the " handsomest unhandsome man " she knew. Tall, clean-shaved, black-haired, with dark eyes of a singular intensity, he wore a manner as unpretentious as his clothes. This was heightened to-day by an air of detachment from the enforced situation.

Above greetings and introductions, tintillated comment over the setting of Seff's top-floor. Arranged as a miniature auditorium, its rows of ashwood chairs faced a small stage, equipped with footlights. Wrought on the grey velvet curtain—that concealed the exact nature of this adventure in advertising—was the title—

THE LITTLE OLD LADY OF LORRAINE

At the twelfth chime of a concealed clock, an orchestral whisper of the *Marseillaise* caused the audience, creatures of habit, to seek their places. John Cabot, although offended as always by the commercialization of patriotism in cafés and music halls and the like, stood in front of the prominent chairs to which an usher had led his wife and himself. Those about him also stood, if with treasonable sighs; as the music died away they sank relievedly into their chairs.

The curtain parted. Vincent Seff appeared and lifted the right of his artistic hands.

" Patrons—may I say friends ? " he began, when their mannerly palm-patting had ceased.

The silence of curiosity greeted his hesitant, yet pleasantly delivered announcement. Only Mrs. Hutton understood his need of courage, his desire for pseudo-sincerity. Virulently though she appeared to condemn him, she evidently wished him to succeed in this, his monster imposition. She had poured the stiff drink which lubricated his voice to that especial smoothness. She stood in the improvised wings, an expression which would have defied a mental analyst hardening her face, as she listened to the delivery of the brief speech which she had helped him prepare.

" Always have we admired the lingerie from Lorraine, you and I. But how many of you have stopped to wonder whose hands are responsible for its textile exquisiteness, its chic, and the needlework that makes it more lovely than any other

in the world? With the many changes which war has wrought, came the fear that our American fair would be reduced to less attractive underwear. Imagine, then, my joy when there arrived recently, unsolicited and in trust, a shipment from my little old lady of Lorraine."

The speaker smiled upon the interested faces below in humid, self-deprecatory appeal.

"The pluck as well as the embroidery of this maker was, all through the war, a marvel to the trade. For weeks her home was under enemy fire, and the grand dame herself in constant danger of her devoted life. But alone in her cellar workshop she plied her needle, as industriously as the *Boches* laid down their shells. Such heroism swells the heart and chokes the voice."

After a brief substantiating pause, the shopman continued, as if glorying in his show of emotion.

"Why did she do it? Not for herself, surely, since the value of her work would have counted little against the loss of her life. Patrons—friends—*she did it for France.* Every mite that she earned was tossed into the coffers of her country. Now that the reconstruction period is on, she still finds work for her withered hands to do—still not for herself—but for the war orphans of the French. Every cent which this shipment yields will be spent on children whom the great struggle has deprived of their natural protectors. Not even a commission will be subtracted. No price has been set upon the things which I am about to show you. I feel that they are priceless. In the name of that little old lady of Lorraine I shall give them to you for what you offer, and have no fear for the net results. To show them from boxes on my counters—the mere thought seemed unworthy the trust placed in me. Will you try to like the more unique method which I have devised?"

Bowing deeply and repeatedly in response to perfunctory applause, Vincent Seff backed from view. Orchestral whispers of the *Marche Lorraine* accompanied a flurry of exclamation. The grey velvet curtain parted; lifted.

The set was a bedchamber. Through a half-open door showed the suggestion of a tiled bathroom. Another door

and the two windows were closed. Once the eyes became accustomed to the indeterminate light, they made out rare hangings and furniture that appeared to wear the stamp of Louis XIV. Beneath the satin coverlet of the bed, an elongated lump suggested a human figure asleep. Upon one pillow a lace cap indicated rather than covered a mass of murky hair.

For several minutes the orchestral rendition of Schumann's *Traumerei* was the only action of the piece. In time the pantomime of a morning's awakening began—a shudder of the coverlet, a stretching of legs beneath and of rounded arms above. The face which uplifted from its background of locks and lace suggested a loathful emergence from dreams. With some degree of energy a hand reached out and pressed a bell. That accomplished, the luxurious sleeper slipped beneath the eider-down and again drowsed off.

The entrance of a soft-treading, black-garbed, middle-aged maid brought diversion. Her lips moved in a supposed good-morning. She drew up the window blinds, flooding the room with light. Her disappearance into the bathroom was followed by the plash of water in a tub.

Her simulation of annoyance on returning to the bedside, to find the dreamer reclaimed, was a nice histrionic bit. She reminded; urged; finally shook. At last the lady of lethargy, smiling deliciously, aroused to a sitting posture. The thrown coverlet bared two rosy feet for the enclosure of satin mules. She deserted the nest of the night, crossed the room—front stage—and stood with arms uplifted as an aid to her yawns.

The spotlight found her some seconds before the maid could throw over her a bath robe of silk so pliant that it might have been drawn through a bracelet.

Inhalations and forward-leanings moved the audience.

Indeed, there was cause for comment. The daring of Seff in his presentation, the novelty of the crêpe sleeping-gown which, innocent of *filet* or ribbons, depended solely upon its Empire lines and girdling silken cord—even the type of the model was rare.

Pretty of face beyond question, with a luminous sort of

pallor, red lips delicately full and purplish, child-wide eyes, she stood revealing through the sheer a body both slender and rounded. Discussions of her as frank as they were low-pitched proved that the pantomime was "taking" from the start.

John Cabot was of the few who suppressed remark, but none watching him could have doubted his interest.

Catherine curved an amused smile at him.

"*Et tu Brute,*" she murmured.

At first from natural endowment and later from deliberate effort, John always had believed in the virtue of women—until compelled to disbelieve. To-day he was studying neither the exquisite, hand-stitched garment, nor the "points" of the manikin who wore it.

Had he really seen lines of suffering at the corners of that smiling mouth? Had he imagined a look of distress in eyes which momentarily had met, but now evaded his? He was no sentimentalist. Yet he wondered.

Vincent Seff, from a chair at the far right of the first row, looked entertained, by his own entertainment. He sat slouched forward, knees crossed, elbow on them, chin in palm, eyes up-gazing. A flush was on his rather anæmic skin. Occasionally his cheeks twitched in an odd, carefully controlled smirk. He nodded, now and then, as if well pleased.

John, glancing toward the shopman, saw the tip of his tongue appear and wipe both lips. About Seff, too, he wondered.

From the wings, Mrs. Hutton watched all—the play, the "house," the man who had conceived and perpetrated the coup, and the newspaper reporters upon whom he depended to give it city-wide circulation. She, however, did not wonder about Seff. Only too well she understood why he was off guard at the moment, showing tendencies which, ordinarily, his policy would have concealed.

She did not wonder, no. But she feared for him as much as, with a reaction that crushed the fear, she hotly, contemptuously resented him. As she studied the look fixed upon the girl whom he had chosen at first glance from a room

full of attractive applicants, almost did she hate him. The chains of the hideous relationship which shackled together him and her seemed to clank, as she turned from his unconscious pantomime to that which he had planned.

The playlet proceeded.

The model trailed her bath robe to the door of the tiled room, there to throw it off and disappear within. Presumedly she plunged into her tub. At any rate, her next appearance, although fleeting, gave that impression. Just a glimpse of her was caught, as the maid pushed wider the door to supply a bath towel, but a glimpse that brought gasps from the audience, sharp as though they, too, had taken a cold plunge.

With hair twisted in a Grecian knot atop her head, she showed—for the brief moment before the door was closed—garbed only in the flimsiest of silken undervests. By comparison she looked amply clad, when, some seconds later, she re-entered the bedroom, stockinged, slippered and girdled, her outer garment a confection of the chemise persuasion, which laid claim to modesty only in its blush hue. The length lacking in this costume was remedied by the maid. After a chase—whose obvious object was further to show the cut and texture of the display—the woman succeeded in noosing the head of her charge with a hemstitched petticoat.

Upon the door sounded a knock of that portentousness met only on the stage. In effective dismay, the manikin paused front stage, the spotlight obligingly following her example. The maid, moved by belated prudery, scurried to a cupboard, from which, after a search whose duration would not have recommended her either for system or dispatch, she emerged with a negligee that matched the morning set. This she draped about her young mistress, and then stood off to admire it with a deliberation accented by repetitions of the portentous knock.

When the door at last was opened, expectation of the unusual was gainsaid by the man-servant who laid several ribbon-bedizened boxes upon the couch and departed. Mistress and maid became animated by curiosity. The parcels were undone and their contents examined—a dozen sets of

lingerie only less lovely than the one worn by the model in that they were less attractively displayed.

These still lay about the room on chairs, tables and bed when, at the entertainment's end, Vincent Seff himself appeared before the footlights. His face was noticeably flushed, his voice thicker than before in his invitation that all should ascend the stage and personally inspect the shipment from Lorraine.

If applause meant appreciation, he must have been gratified. And, in fact, the tribute was sincere. The hour's advertising whimsy had been both amusing and artistic. Commendatory chatter lifted as the spectators disturbed their chairs.

John Cabot was preoccupied by an analysis of the look seen on the face of the master of ceremonies, a look which had intensified as Seff studied, not so much the piece as the star. Since a certain incidental which the financier had noticed, the elaborate exhibition had become offensive to him.

In the manikin's small tussle over the adjustment of her petticoat, just when she had been laughing with most abandon, two somethings—gleaming, small, yet large in suggestion—had dropped from her eyes and been absorbed by the crêpe.

That she could weep for shame, while successfully playing her frolicsome part, meant a great deal. Many young girls might have wept before entering upon such a career. Most could be imagined as weeping afterward. But to realize and suffer enough for tears in what evidently was an initial step——

Although Catherine had often told John that he was losing his sense of humour, nobody could have declared him deficient in vision.

He was recalled to the immediate present by the lifted voice of his wife addressing Seff.

"I will give five hundred dollars," she was saying, "for the set shown on the model. The things are exquisite and the charity deserves response."

"My *dear* Mrs. Cabot!" The shopman over-accented that familiarity which the lofty seem so to appreciate from traffic-policemen, waiters, hotel clerks and the like. "The identical set is yours. I thank you from my heart, and from the hearts of those orphans of France."

"I'll take them with me," stipulated Catherine. "Have the box put in my car, please. And, Seff, I am in something of a hurry."

The crispness of her conclusion was like frost on a sunlit window-pane. The merchant showed himself nipped by it.

"I'll attend to your order at once, Mrs. Cabot."

Disregarding the importunities of less prominent would-be purchasers, he hurried back to the stage.

"Mary—*Mary!*" His voice was pitched several notes above its unwonted mellifluence.

Mrs. Hutton appeared.

"Take charge out here, Mary," he directed. "Let the ladies step up and examine the lot. Every garment has the inimitable chic attained only by the French, and the sizes vary, so that—— *You* know, Mary. Take anything that is offered. Such patrons aren't going to fail our lady of Lorraine."

Far too elated was he to notice his chief aide's expression as she observed his uneven manner, his flushed face, and the glitter of his eyes. In the same thought, she sneered, pitied and suspected. She turned to attend the gathering patrons.

Seff had not noticed, but another had. John Cabot had followed to the stage, and now stood contemplating the closed door that gave upon the supposititious bathroom. Through it the shopman had disappeared. A mental reminder that the whole circumstance was doubtless gross chicanery, and, at the worst, none of his affair, seemed somehow dampened by his memory of those two small, enlightening somethings which he had seen drip from the eyes of a laughing girl. From within he could hear fragments in Seff's thick tones.

"A hit. . . . Five hundred for the set you adorn. . . . Let me help, you dream. . . . No time—she's in a hurry. . . . I *will*. . . . Hush, dear heart, they'll hear you."

Ensued a duet of his chuckles and gasped protests in a softer voice. The end unmistakably was a scuffle.

John turned away, disagreeably impressed. Many of the fashionables had ascended the stage, where Mrs. Hutton was offering the Seff confections for sale. He assured himself that he must be imagining the alert turn of the forewoman's head

toward the closed door and the annoyance that falsified her smile. Then he flouted the advice. He didn't imagine—*he saw*. The woman *was* alert and annoyed.

The conclusion was substantiated. Sounds that might have been laughter or sobs percolated through the keyhole. Rasped gutturals interrupted, pleaded, threatened. There followed a rushing sound and a thump against the inside of the door.

John recrossed the stage. As he hesitated, he saw Mrs. Hutton drop the garment under discussion and approach him.

Next moment a scream rent all uncertainty.

The most cynical scarcely could have mistaken the cry for anything but one of terror, even without the words—intense, jumbled, regardless—that translated it.

"No. . . . *No*. . . . I hate you. . . . Father, help me—*save me!*"

Before Mrs. Hutton could force the resisting handle of the door, John Cabot had put his shoulder against the panel and had broken the lock.

CHAPTER VI

THE scene within the back room of the bath-set impressed John like a stoppage on a film which had been full of action. First glance might have convinced a superficial person that intrusion was a mistake, but the financier was not limited to first glances.

Leaning against the farther wall, her apparel reduced to the flimsiest of the samples on recent display, stood the manikin. Both hands clasped the shoulders of Seff.

John glanced away; looked again; saw other things.

The girl was straining to push away the shopman, not to draw him to her. In her eyes, uplifted at the crashing of the door, was pictured the terror which had sounded in her cry. Her face was white—looked the whiter for a mark, shaped after the imprint of teeth, which was reddening in the flesh of her cheek.

Seff's arm wrapped her body tightly. His other hand was

entangled in her flimsy garment at the breast. His face, also turned towards the door, shuddered with an absorbed, strange look between hope and hopelessness.

John Cabot stood on the threshold, held by astonishment. He had heard that high prices oft-times were exacted of shop-girls, as of aspirants for the stage. But this situation would have seemed incredible except that there it was before his eyes.

In that scant moment of hesitation, the pros and cons of the issue, as concerned himself, flashed through his mind. The principles in this behind-the-scenes passion play were not of his class, or so Catherine would have said. Both were total strangers to him, therefore their relationship was not his affair. More or less undesirable notoriety must result from interference—the inevitable compliment to the Cabot millions.

However, just as he knew himself not to be a number of things which Catherine would have wished him to be, he was one thing in particular which she did not wish him to be. There had been many times when, frankly, he had congratulated himself on having been a human being long before a multi-millionaire.

Through the space which he had vacated in the doorway flocked a covey of fashion's vultures. His audience formed as he crossed the room and laid a golf-hardened grip upon Seff's shoulder. There was an instant of resistance. Then he tore the man away from the cowering girl.

Almost was he tripped to a fall. Glancing down, he noted a silken swirl upon the floor. His first act, after throwing aside the drink-maddened roué, was to gather up the negligee last shown outside and lay it about the model's shoulders.

He faced around to meet Seff's thick-lipped threats.

"Wha—what do you mean? You'll answer to me for your interference and before you're a minute older."

The shopman chopped out at him recklessly, landing several blows.

Taller than Seff by half a head, superbly fit in comparison, John stood as if stricken by sudden inability. His eyes were upon the scandalized throng that had crowded into the room,

rather than his opponent. He protected himself in a confused, inadequate way from a succession of attacks, while he was considering a plan to spare the girl odium and involve her tormentor.

Evidently elated by the success of his tactics, Seff paused for emphasis.

"What d'you mean butting into my affairs?" he demanded.

"This," answered John.

With the word, he sent his right fist to a particular spot in the fellow's face.

The effect was startling. Seff's head lopped, his eyes rolled, his body wavered and stretched its length upon the floor.

Fright-cries rose from the crush about the door; above them, a shrill demand in Catherine's voice.

"John, are you mad?"

The first person to reach the prone figure was, however, without utterance. An equivocal look of dread and triumph was on Mary Hutton's face, as she knelt beside the man who was her employer—and more; she raised his head to her knee; held a bottle of smelling salts to his nose.

John Cabot's attention returned to the cause of the bout.

The model had wrapped the negligee closely around her and stood awaiting developments with dilated eyes. On her cheek, the mark of teeth showed redder than before. At his glance, she took a forward step, as if to thank him, then, embarrassed by the press of people around the door, she stopped.

Without words, they two regarded only each other. Quite still they stood, looking.

And as they looked, comrade spirits seemed to become visible in the glow of an incipient understanding. Beside her—faded in until to John it became as plain as her body—appeared a vision of loveliness and lure. Shy, yet unafraid, this vision beckoned him. From eyes bluer than the troubled deeps of the girl's gaze, it smiled on him. With hair golden as the dreams of a child and tenuous as woman's wiles, it awoke in him a thrill like that on seeing the homeland banner

in foreign climes. The fragrance that accompanies the aspirations of youth filled his nostrils. A thought of apple-blossoms hurt his mind with midsummer weariness.

From his heart, as if aroused by its increasing beat, uprose response to the vision. Not as if born of the moment—rather as if long protected from impious eyes—an emotion new to him seemed to take form. He felt that the girl, as well as he, must see and recognize.

Cruel with tenderness, eager with fear, the emotion that had arisen from his heart-beats passed, like a gallant shape, from him to her. In command that was, in truth, but a prayer, it faced the comrade soul of her.

For a moment and an age, the eyes of the financier and those of the shopgirl met and held, each pair the other. Met also, in that age of moment's length, the lad Amor, a creature of the spirit whose first desire is to have and to hold, with Innocentia, one not more to cherish than to fear.

A low-voiced, fragmentary conversation recalled John to the more material present.

"You, Mary?"

"Who else? At your worst I would not dare to desert you."

"Any more than I would you. If you hadn't poured me so much of—— Anyhow I've done what you said I couldn't do—put over a sweatshop fake that——"

"Hush, Vin. Come, get up."

Turning, John saw Mrs. Hutton steady Seff to his feet.

An imperative voice at his own elbow advised: "Better come with me at once, John, unless you wish to get into the newspapers."

"That is just what I do wish, Catherine," he said.

"But as the protector of this latest *Inconnue*?"

"Unknown?" John glanced at his wife surprisedly, then to the wall against which the manikin had stood.

Gone was the luring vision which his mother had taught him to believe was the soul of womanhood. Gone also the girl.

His sense of loss must have shown in his face.

"Why not play Don Quixote for some one more ambi-

tious ? " Catherine gibed. " Ask me to nominate them—as your wife, I could choose the subjects with regard to the family honour and glory. There are reporters in that crowd. Once they recognize you——"

" Reporters ? " He took a step toward the crush. " Publicity—that's the cure for this scourge ! Where are they ? "

" But, John——" The wife who never could decide whether she disapproved or admired her husband the more, remembered in the emergency to be guileful. " Would you crush the victim to clear the scourge ? Shouldn't chivalry protect the good name of that girl ? At least, she is young."

" For once you are right. Excuse me a moment. I must find a telephone."

He strode away.

" Mule, and mad, at that—a mad mule ! "

The finality of Catherine's thought-tribute turned her to her own predicament. Her shrug redraped about her shoulders the satin-smooth mantle of her social superiority. There was a chance that she might escape inclusion in whatever notoriety should ensue. Did not a woman and a mother—the occasion evoked a thought of Jackie—owe her first duty to herself ? Let John take the consequences of his mania for reform, even to being advertised as loitering alone at a lingerie show !

Directly upon the decision to detach herself from possibly unpleasant consequences, she skimmed the edge of the crowd and left the store.

When John Cabot returned to the stage, he saw that Seff was already surrounded by the reporters. Mrs. Hutton stood at his elbow, a bottle from which she had poured some sort of restorative in one hand, an emptied glass in the other.

The shopman looked distressed, either by the dose pressed upon him or by his recent experience—perhaps by both. He was speaking with something of the fluency of his recent " speech," while adjusting his delicately-toned tie and brushing from one sleeve a reminder of his fall.

" I am Vincent Seff, owner of this establishment. A slight misunderstanding occurred inside, yes. But I have a hope that you good people, also guests at my entertainment, will

respect my hospitality enough to withhold its unfortunate *finale* from your papers."

The Press representatives, three women and a lone man, looked dubious at this claim. A second man, tilted in a chair against the wall, who was in the act of finishing a creditable sketch of the manikin, lifted to Cabot a companionable grin.

"Good, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is. What will you take for it?"

"What will I take?" The grin broadened. "Why, a better art job than the one I've got."

"Unfortunately I can't pay that."

"Sorry not to oblige an admirer of my work." The artist banged down the forelegs of the tilted chair and gathered up his paraphernalia for departure. "If it's your nice little idea to keep the girl's picture out of the paper, it wouldn't help any to withhold this. The camera gang departed on the run some time ago."

Seff, at Mrs. Hutton's touch on his arm, had turned and seen the addition to their group. He continued in urgent tones:

"Of course you must write your stories right, boys and girls. But I do wish you'd go light on this finish. For the sake of a highly valued patron, I should regret to have a certain name figured. Also, it scarcely seems fair to jeopardize the chances of an over-impulsive young girl, just at her start of life."

"But her scream, Mr. Seff?"

"And the door-smashing?"

"Not to mention that lively bout?"

The trio of women scribes prodded him, as though satellites of the sport instead of fashion page.

The dapper designer plunged.

"I admit that there was a small fracas, but it was due entirely to a misunderstanding. It is all patched up now, therefore not worth mentioning. For once I was at fault in my choice of an employee. You will agree, I am sure, that my attempt at an artistic display could not have carried any evil suggestion to the clean minds for whose pleasure and profit it was planned. I scarcely know how to express myself, friends. Do try to appreciate my position."

He glanced, as if for helpful suggestion, toward Mary

Hutton, then went on, evidently planning his defence in its delivery.

"The poor girl was hysterical from nervous strain over her first public appearance. She could not have intended to give such rein to her impulses as—as—— Of course, a woman who will exhibit herself in such a rôle is not exactly—— Well, I'll not go into that. But I owe it to myself to say that even I, experienced at judging women by their face values, would not have believed our guileless-looking Dolores Trent capable of a deliberate attempt to compromise an employer who——"

"*Cad!*"

At the interruption, Seff took a backward step, evidently remembering the reach and force of the speaker's punch.

John Cabot, with a frown, stayed the three women and lone man who, having been given the all-important name of the woman in the case, were on the point of taking wing.

"Best wait a minute," he advised. "You haven't got the real story yet. This sale is a fake. The goods were manufactured in Seff's own sweatshops right here in New York. The money was taken under false pretences. I am not in a position to state just how usual among supposedly high-class shops is the sort of indelicacy we've witnessed this morning. Fortunately, however, I am able to make an example of this instance. I am John Cabot. I ask you to investigate."

"I have heard enough of this contemptible attack, no matter who or what you are." Seff hurled himself into the breach as bravely as his condition would permit. "Nothing but respect for the feelings of your wife has kept me from having you ejected before this. You cannot influence the newspapers against us. We are, as you should know, persistent advertisers. I ask you now to go quietly and at once, before I——"

For a moment it seemed that his advice had been accepted. John Cabot turned and crossed to the rim of the stage. There he lifted his hand to the lingering society contingent.

"I have sent for the police," he said. "They'll be here any minute now. They have a habit, I'm told, of taking the names of eye-witnesses. Subpœnas generally arrive at

awkward moments, so I'd suggest that such of you as have any important engagements for the near future——"

He had said enough. The remaining "valued patrons" broke the leash of curiosity and hurried away after the example of the "thoroughbred" Mrs. Cabot. Be it added that they waited not for the elevator, nor counted the steps in the flight of their descent.

For diverse reasons, a group remained with John Cabot during his brief wait for the detectives of the nearby Tenderloin police-station. The reporters stayed because of the "realer" crux of the story explaining the scream of a shopgirl; Mrs. Hutton because, as she had asserted, she dared not desert Seff; the owner himself because of the competent look of a golf-steeled right, swinging from an arm whose length and strength he knew.

Seff gained considerable reassurance from a *sotto voce* consultation with his forewoman, who, in the emergency, seemed to have reversed the usual relationship of employed to employer. He greeted the officers as though they had come at his request, and asked that they should search the store for the model. She, although the cause of the disturbance, would be needed, he declared, as his chief witness.

Upon the report that no trace of her could be found, he addressed himself to the financier with a noticeable cessation of resentment.

The girl was gone, he pointed out. That fact was substantial evidence of her guilty intent toward himself. No real harm had been done, and nothing would be gained by going through with his arrest on a charge that could not be proved. Certainly, with their combined influence, the unpleasant aftermath of what so many had voted a pleasant morning could be kept from the papers. Had Mr. Cabot no thought for the consequence of the use of his name in such a connection? Even though he cared nothing for his own reputation, did he not owe something to his family? Sentiment aside, with no complaining witness, what could he gain to equal what he would lose by carrying out his threat?

"But there is a complainant," John assured him pleasantly enough. "That rôle is mine."

"*You?* Can you possibly intend——"

Mrs. Hutton it was who found voice for direct demand. "What is the charge? We have a right to know, sir."

"Assault." John Cabot directly faced the shopman. Humour twitched his mouth as he asked: "Did you think that I let you hit me for my own selfish pleasure?"

As the motor patrol purred its way to the station house, however, the amusement faded from his face. The Fall air whipped his longing for the gentle zephyrs of Spring, for the breath of apple-blooms, for the sound of a flute playing Mendelssohn's vaguely passionate themes.

He forced himself back to certain troubleful questions of the moment. The manikin, Dolores Trent—what of her? The very strength of his desire to find her advised that he should not look for her. Why favour himself as a trailer, while jailing Seff? But where would she hide herself—what would she do?

CHAPTER VII

MORNING in a land of endless twilight!

The spirit-girl lay late abed after that first awakening in Gehenna, as she realized with the switching off of the mauve curtains which had shut sunrise from her chamber. On her show of weariness after last night's ordeal, she had been told how King Satan, after his preference for the customs of Earth, had time apportioned into periods of day and night, with eventide and dawn, midnight and noon exactly fixed. By means of his electric sun, moon and attendant stars, supplied from the power accumulators on the eastern and western fringes of the Gehennan desert, the semi-light shed from the eternal radiance of the Elysian Fields was made to seem negligible.

Dolores had been grateful for the respite. The shades about the court, she had noted, looked more or less material according to their naturalization into Shadow Land. She herself had been declared unusually visible, even for a newcomer, and was expected to have the habits of her late estate.

She had not slept the sleep of Earth, any more than she had tasted the suggestion-foods of last night's banquet, except as a reminiscence of taste. Yet, with eyelids closed against sight of what was, and her inner vision limited to the dearest of what had been, she had passed into a sort of soul-rest—into memories and imaginings that were one fond, commingled dream of John Cabot.

Further aroused by a subservient voice, she sank an elbow into the damask-sheened pillow; lifted herself; opened eyes and mind to the now.

"Your shower is turned on, m'lady."

The repetition was in English. Before, the same words had been spoken in French. Such perfect intonation in two languages piqued her interest. She glanced around to see standing beside her couch a woman-shade in the black and white of service.

"Madame's hair is so black, perhaps she is Italian. I trust I have not startled you. His Majesty ordered that your bath be of cold cathode rays. They are very exhilarating if one can stand the shock."

Although this third offering came in the honey-sweet language of love, a look of hate was on the serving woman's face.

"Who are you?" Dolores asked in the tongue of first choice.

"You may call me Adeline. I am your maid."

Somewhat disconcerted by the unservile gesture with which a robe of rainbow lights was held out for her convenience, Dolores put another question.

"How do you come to speak three languages? And doesn't the name Adeline mean of noble birth?"

"Ah, Madame also is French. She will the better understand." A smile less pleased than bitter stiffened the patrician lips. "I am of noble birth, and on earth I was treated according to my rank. But the judgment that consigned me to the Realm of Reversals has changed all that. Here we who were ladies serve our former maids. And hard taskmistresses they are, given thus the power to equalize their past humiliations."

A thought of the fate awaiting Catherine Cabot made

Dolores shudder. "A grim conceit that—I suppose the King's own?"

The demoted noblewoman nodded. "Not Lucretia Borgia herself could have conceived so cruel a sentence. It is not the tasks from which I suffer, but the thought of doing them. My first position was to serve the creature whom I had treated with all consideration in my household, she who afterward cost me my husband, my position in society, and my life. Madame understands? I killed her. Madame's shower is turned on."

She who never had been served sought to refuse the offices of this quondam great lady. On Earth no one had drawn up the morning shades for her, she declared; no one had brushed the cobwebs of dreams from her lashes with dampened cloths; proffered the steaming beauty cup, perfumed her bath, placed her mules, held her robe. No need was there for Adeline to suffer while under assignment to her.

She was ill-repaid for her kindly intent.

"It is then, as I feared; Madame is but one of them herself."

With contemptuous manner, m'lady-who-was insisted upon performing those duties which she knew so well from having exacted them.

"I must serve you," she explained, "whether you wish to be served or not. I must work out my sentence. None dares tamper with the Rule of the Realm of Reversals. My husband warns me——"

"Your husband? Are you so fortunate as to have his company here?"

A moment the maid contemplated the eagerness on her new mistress's face, then gave a vicious twist to the mass of dark hair she was arranging. "That he received a red ticket, is the one bit of justice I have found in Greater Gehenna. He bungled the trick of obtaining that verdict in man's favour, usually granted gratis by the world."

"You speak, Adeline, as though you hated him."

"Hate him?" Fury shook the cultured voice. "Is it not because of him that I am here? And he—he always seeks me at the fête of servant-fiends, to complain of the

humiliations forced upon him by his ex-valet, for well he knows that his only chance of reversal will come through me. Since Madame is so good as to inquire, I do hate the man I loved. I hate him the more, perhaps, for controlling his hate of me—for his pretence of continued love."

To Dolores, the strange creature's will to hurt her by twisting her hair was kind compared with this unintentional squeezing of the hope-drops from her heart. Would every one about the court have power to make her suffer for her past? When he—whose companionship her lost soul craved so unutterably—should one day be sentenced to this realm for their common social crime, would he also hide hate in a pretence still to love?

But no. Although on Earth John had not sought her as had other men and at the last had seemed to desert, she dared not believe that the great heart of him could change when he came through the gate into the Lower Land—when, one day, he joined her.

The mother-soul's good-morning to her babe was interrupted by a message from the King. She was to attend him at once in the Garden of Bad Luck.

Dismay possessed Dolores. Probably His Majesty meant to probe deeper, with his knife-like cynicisms of last night, into the wounds of her former state. But a thought of the folly of foreboding soon steadied her. She had no choice.

"I shall go at once," she told the maid. "I feel quite rested and strong."

"I should suggest to Madame that she omit to mention her restful night," Adeline said. "Otherwise he will not permit that it happen again. He awaits beside the Hard Luck fountain."

Dolores in turn offered advice. "While I am gone, doff that cap and apron and imagine that you are a lady again. He'll never know, for I won't tell and the babe can't."

"Never know, *he*?" The French soul smiled briefly. "Madame perhaps will excuse, but evidently she is not yet acquainted with m'lord of reversals. *Know?* I myself should tell him if none else did. He would compel me to do so."

To Dolores' relief, the King seemed to have forgotten her

regrettable history when she found him awaiting her at the spot of his appointment. At any rate, he made no reference thereto.

"I am going to show you around my place," he informed her. "I take a pleasant shame in it. Guess I've got what real-estaters call 'the property sense'—a brand of nonsense."

He led her through an avenue-like effect of lime trees to a lawn of dwarfed red-top, where stood a winged vehicle, as much an improvement over the planes of Earth as was the motor-car over Grimes' one-horse shay.

"My aeromobile," he announced with prideful gesture.

Although of a mind given to taking for granted all mechanical details, Dolores could not but wonder at this craft. Its wings looked more like those of a huge hawk than the rigid spread of the aeroplanes she had seen flying low over Central Park. Instead of standing upon wheeled running-gear, bird feet of a proportionate size clawed into the ground. In its head glittered a constantly moving pair of eyes.

"However do you rise in that?" Dolores asked. "And once you do get up, how do you make it go? And up and off, how do you land?"

Satan was frankly gratified by her interest.

"They call me," he exulted, "'Prince of the Power of the Air.' From its essence I create whatsoever I will."

"Then this, too, is only illusion?"

"But illusion realer than the Rock of Ages. Effects made by electricity are indestructible. You can switch them off, as you can transfer existence from one state to another, but you cannot destroy them." His look intensified. "This element and the immortal soul are the only two absolutely steadfast quantities."

"Except—" she hesitated—"except good in the heart."

"Except evil in the mind, you mean."

He snapped the correction at her, evidently displeased, but soon returned to the subject of his "Hell Hawk." In a round of the machine, he showed her a propeller placed beneath the fuselage by which it might be lifted straight or lowered on reverse; explained the encased "pusher" at the stern and "puller" at the bow which furnished silent

horizontal speed; described the shock absorbers with which the talons were equipped, and the practicability of reflecting scenes below in the moving mirror-like eyes.

"Experience is the best demonstrator. May I hand you in?"

Dolores sank into the double seat that swung like a hammock across the roomy cock-pit. Satan placed himself beside her, seized the "stick" by which his super-bird was directed, and pressed the starting button.

Like an elevator the aeromobile shot upward, with an utter lack of vibration that gave the effect of hella-firma receding, while their craft stood still. Soon, however, he released the lofting button to press that which gave power to the drivers. Forward through space they started at a speed which would not have seemed speed at all, except for the mounting figures shown upon a dial set into the invisible air-screen before them. They seemed to hover above, while Gehenna raced past them below.

"It is—wonderful," breathed the Apollyon guest, pauperized in expression by the emotions that accompany a first flight.

He nodded. "Consider this morning's air-joying one of your rewards for being, although a factory girl, *somewhat* different from the rest."

She turned to him. "You must have some object in treating me so well. What is it?"

"Ha, you are like the rest of woman, after all—curious!" His Highness exclaimed. "Must every she-soul know the end of the story first? Suppose my object is to acquaint you with myself through my works. 'By their works ye shall know them.' So look and know. Apply what mind you have to getting a panoramic conception of the extent of my kingdom. Notice the estates surrounding the palace park. I have given them over to vari-villains so fortunate as to have merited my approval."

When Dolores gripped the edge of the swinging seat and leaned to peer over the side of the fuselage, he objected.

"Why must you earthlings do everything the hardest way? Let the Hawk see for you."

He indicated an artfully arranged series of mirrors which reflected through the eyes of the bird a moving picture of scenes beneath.

"It looks like—like a picture-postcard of some tropical city, only not so bright and more squat," she observed after a moment. "It is neatly laid out."

"It *is* neat," Satan admitted. "Our perpetual heat-without-rain does fade the colours, though. The only moisture we get down here is when the angels weep over some new triumph of mine. Hell knows that I try to make them open the ducts more often. If ever I learn to weep myself, I'll likely irrigate a lot of suffering."

"Why do you wish to weep?"

"People seem to enjoy it so. As for the squatness of the bungalows, what can you expect in the most tropical of climates? Assume a little imagination if you have it not. You should have seen the place before I took hold of it. At first, after my sudden fall into utter desolation from the Paradisian comforts of home, I couldn't see any possibilities in Gehenna. But I never was one to let bad enough alone."

"Oh, I didn't say that I thought it bad," Dolores hastened to insert.

"No, you didn't, but you'd better! Of course, it's not what it might be, even now, but it was a perfect chaos when I began, a sort of peaceful haze, with not so much as a suffering gnat for me to vent my disposition on."

"It's so different from anything that——" Dolores puzzled.

"Did you expect to find Pluto wallowing in a lake of fire, *à la* Milton?"

"Gehenna is a place of torture, isn't it? I wasn't taught what they call religion in my childhood, but I typed the sermons of a minister for a while, and I know what——"

She hesitated, regretting her persistence. Satan's facial expression, always mobile, had altered for the worse.

"A minister, eh?" he asked fiercely. "I suppose he ranted the regular hell-fire stuff? Let me tell you that keeping the realities of my place from the preach-praters of Earth is the hardest thing I do. If they conceived a fraction of my achievements in the torture line, even in this vestibule to the real hell

farther on, I'd never have a chance to hang out the S. O. S. sign—never. Earthlings *would* be good, and The Great Intention foiled."

"The Great Intention, sir? What can you mean?"

He glared at her, and snarled his reply: "Greater than you have gone to the chair of perpetual voltage for the impertinence of asking that. None knows my Great Intention save myself. It is 'closed up and sealed until the time of the end.' But woe betide the red soul in Gehenna that does not work toward its fulfilment!"

So threatening was his manner that the girl-shade shrank away; as soon as she dared, she returned her attention to the topographical features of the world infernal.

Back whence they had come, over incalculable miles of couchant dwellings, Apollyon Palace and its gardens glittered in the rays of the artificial sun. On either side, taxing to the eye as the illusive distances of a boundless desert, detail merged into mirage-like suggestion of detail, until nothing more could be imagined—quite nothing more except infinitude of space.

As they sped through the high-tempered air, shafts of fire-flecked smoke reached up as if to devour them. Directly below, for sections which might have been miles or tens of miles each, huddled a series of convex structures, with the round chimneys of pottery kilns. Massed here and there were what looked to be warehouses and factories.

The tension of the royal mood relaxed in a free gesture.

"Object to my furnaces smoking? I have to burn some fire and brimstone to satisfy the preconceived mortal idea of damnation. The old-timers would think less of me if I didn't. At that, I'm sparing of it—bagging the gases for future needs. You look surprised. Do earthlings really believe that the idea of poison gas was made in Germany? Why, my child, I've looked forward for ages to the destructiveness of the fumes thrown off by burning fiends incarnate—the real thing, you know, made in Hell!"

Irritation again nettled his voice at the look on the face bent low to gaze through the rising heat-hazes.

"You work as hard as a Cook's tourist at sight-seeing. Don't make the mistake of supposing you can get more than

an illustrative idea of Greater Gehenna in a day, a week, or even a year. Just a cursory glance this morning. To the East stretch our fire-proof picture storage warehouses, where we stow millions a minute of the life-films of important earthlings. Below is the Devil's Own Play-House. Make a guess at its capacity."

Dolores, however, made no guess. Her interest had centred in a small, incredibly luminous lake that attracted even as it hurt the eye.

"What is yonder pool and the great gleaming ball that floats above, like the soap-bubble of a god?"

"That is the one biggest bubble of *the* god. Chief thing I wanted you to see. You *have* a germ of intelligence—don't bother to cultivate it, for it's not to be compared with your other attractions. What I want of you is—— But I digress."

He declared the "bubble" his latest and greatest invention—the last blow, so to speak, in motion picture photography, by which events on Earth might be pictured simultaneously with their occurrence.

Just then the Ball of Life, not being in use, was uncovered so that it might absorb atmospheric vitality. The countless prisms of spirits of mercury which composed the pool acted as one glass in reflecting distant Earth-scenes caught by the whirling bubble, which ignored distances as it did material interference. The vast stadium was enclosed with adjustable electric walls of dark green. There, from under eye-shields, the doings of Earth might be watched as they were done.

"If ever you get homesick, fair house-guest, I'll give you a look-in on the conduct of the dear detained."

"Oh, if you only——"

Dolores smothered her wish in the midst of its expression.

"If I only wouldn't!" Rather disagreeably the King laughed at her obviousness. "Now for a dip below the sun. I abhor this pale, abiding light. Makes me blind as a bat."

As they bolted downward, he volunteered to correct her assumption that already she had arrived in Hell. Greater Gehenna was only the starting station.

"We haven't reached the bottomless pit or the lake of fire yet, not by a world-full. Perhaps——" His coherency

slackened. "*Perhaps* we never shall. That depends upon who is stronger when the test comes, the cast-out near-angel or—— It is a strange thing if bad won't overcome good in the Universe—if ruthlessness and preparedness——"

He checked himself, as though self-accused of disclosing too much to such a neophyte. After a suspicious scowl around at her, he continued:

"That hell-fire idea is only figurative. Why threaten the spirit with physical duress? You have an expression on Earth, 'So near and yet so far,' that has taught me the refinement of torture. I want to show you close-ups of some specials of my invention."

Skimming low, he pointed her attention ahead to the Cage of In-Law Relatives, "absolutely the most vicious spirits ever caught in the toils of durance vile," as he described them, "and the only extant bipeds never tamed."

What had looked a low mountain proved to be a dome-shaped enclosure of such size that the curve on its either side sloped gradually into the perspective. Through the interstices of its barbed wall, thousands upon thousands of *manes*, more female than male, could be seen moving within. From it blew a wind so malignant that Dolores' eyes smarted and her ears roared—a wind of whispers from countless tongues all breathing forth hate at once. Not one of the "in-laws" spoke out. All whispered.

"Blood egotists!" Satan chuckled. "As all the world is more or less eligible for the Cage, I have space only for a few of the most horrible examples. Seems an awful fate to inflict them upon each other, but I discovered early that they are a race unto themselves. There is nothing to equal their viciousness, not even professional jealousy. After all, it is the mean little emotions that people Hell."

The lettered designation of a barrack-like structure was read by Satan:

BASTARD BABY WARD

"There lie the infant-shades along endless aisles. Their cribs are lined with electro-cacti-spines. Their coverlets are of satiny *bisnaga* petals sewed together with their own needles."

His Highness fixed a side glance on the mother-soul's face as he enthused. "Although a virtuous bachelor, I know that their whimpers mean that they want milk. So I feed that 'so near and yet so far' rule unto 'even the least of these.' I have their nursing bottles filled with scalding, opaque air."

"But how can a baby deserve an evil fate?" Dolores demanded. "I was not taught the Scriptures, but does the Great-I-Am, as you call Him, countenance such a law?"

"My favourite author, Deuteronomy, answers that. 'A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord. Even to his tenth generation shall he not enter in.' The sins of fathers being visited upon their children is an unjust law that particularly appeals to me."

At her sob, Satan offered pseudo-consolation. "Be of good cheer. Your bastard is not consigned to the Ward—that is to say, not yet."

Low they sailed over a sub-division more dusty than any passed. Here the scraggliest effect of vegetation ceased. Lizards moved languidly, if at all, and snakes lolled their forked tongues.

Satan, apparently gratified by his proselyte's nervousness, apologized: "Sorry I cannot spare time this morning to take you through Serpent's Tooth Valley. I quite anticipate your pleasure in the antics of my snakes—a sharp-tooth pursuing every thankless well-begot. It's a lively place. You really should get in sympathy with the serpent. He was my first agent and cannot be excelled for loathsomeness. Can you see that rattler—that cobra? From Arizona to the Indies they are feared, hated—*and* respected. By an arbitrary edict, which I cannot at present veto, they've been forced to crawl upon their bellies since early days. But one of my first acts of reward to the unrighteous, after I have come into my own, shall be to set them up again. 'When snakes shall rise on their tails!' A more inspiring line never was writ."

The tourist-by-command shuddered, but did not speak. He followed her gaze towards a barren dune in the distance over which a vapour hovered high as could be seen.

"Nits pestering the Traitors to Mothers, among whom I threatened last night to throw my chef. Although they are

an assorted bad lot, we can afford to pass them, as I had no mother and you next to none. Got the scheme of the chuck-hole from the Book of Revelations: 'Where they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.' It is not that anything in particular is so unendurable. It's the way I keep it up. In rotation I visit all the old-fashioned plagues upon them, murrain, boils and blains, frogs—— But imagine the rest. There is one special side-show that will have a personal appeal to you, to which I feel I should take you before we return. Look out. I'm going to land."

Again the Hawk had acted like an elevator. Its spreading claws clutched the sanded soil, their shock absorbers functioning without jar. The spirit-girl, once again upon hella-firma, gazed dazedly about.

From the rim of a monstrous crater-like cup near by, spilled a steam like a giant's breath, strong, noxious, horrific. When Dolores shrank back, wellnigh overcome, her Satanic guide fanned aside the fumes and drew her upward toward the edge.

"Merely the regrets of the sirens," he insisted. "This is the one *all-woman* department of Gehenna, the Wantons' Well. Lean over. See them gasp. See them try to faint. They hope that they are dying, but no chance of that. Not one ever thinks that she deserves her fate, or acknowledges her own defiance of decency. Her own case, you see, is always 'different.' Only when she is surrounded by others of her kind, thousands of them worse than she, does she begin to comprehend that in the judgments of men women's unpardonable sin may have no difference. Think of that, O fair and famed Dolores Trent—that between you and these, your sisters, there is no difference!"

Although the girl-shade felt about to collapse, she was held by his mental dominance. Leaning, she looked.

Her tormentor continued: "It is hot down there—hot as the curse of society. The wantons burn in a fever of lonely lust. They thirst for a sip of the affection and poetry—even of the rashness which made the passion-cup sweet. For all the endless hours until That Day they'll not get a drop to wet their lying lips and sin-blacked tongues."

A tug upon the hem of the royal robe cut short the

inquisition. An aged female *manes*, sear-looking and fate-limned as would have been a relief map of this Erubian Realm, had tottered up behind them unheard. Her silvered hair writhed backward in the blast from The Well. Her hands shook toward it as shake withered grasses over a dry creek-bed.

"Sire, she cannot stand it much longer down there, my Millie," the crone-soul quavered.

"Ha, Grandma Nuisance again!" Unconventionally Satan introduced her to Dolores. "An oldish lady who has seen better days. Ever notice that most oldish ladies *have* seen better days?"

"I am asking naught for myself, your gracious Majesty. I was old enough to know better. But Millie wasn't twenty yet, and that high-strung and sore-tempted."

Ungraciously His Majesty continued to explain her: "That dame, after an impeccable life on her own account, plunged a knife through the licentious breast of an offspring who, despite frequent asseverations that she'd rather be dead, lacked courage to perform the function for herself. They sentenced the old girl for life, the judge and jury having that weakness for mothers which is bred in the womb of the world. Down here, I haven't seemed to find the right berth for her, so I have left her to her own devices, which take the form of torturing herself in this existence, as in the last, over the sins of her Millie the Magnificent."

With threatening manner he turned on the crone.

"I told you not to follow me again."

"But I am driven. I failed to bring her up right, or she'd never have gone wrong. It's all my fault. Let her out of the well. Let me take her place."

The grief coursing from her faded eyes seemed again to change the variable royal mood. Seizing her wisp of hair, he compelled her to the edge.

"At least you may suffer with her," he conceded. "Misery loves company, they say." He thrust forward her peaked face. When her eyes failed to moisture at thought of the wrench he had given her neck, he essayed a wrench at her heart.

"See Her Magnificence on the ledge just below, parching,

burning, dying an age-long death of thirst. Hi, there, Millicent, have you thought out some new way you might have married him? Here's mother dear, come to bring you a drink. How her brilliant beauty is fading under drought! You who suckled her as a babe, you cannot deny her just one drop? But alas, your bosoms are withered as your face. Surely, though, you're not out of tears?" Over the rim he called: "The drink, the *drink*, Millicent! Mother's tears—extra salt."

Dolores understood that the struggles of the spirit-dame and the wail that came from the depths were in resistance of his mental brutality. Yet she, too, was moved to action by a thought.

Stepping close to the edge, she contested Satan's clutch of the old shade; drew her back; bade her begone.

"Lift your prayers upward, mother," she breathed in a voice of the night-winds. "I have heard that only God Himself can save."

Her shoulders were seized in a fiendish clutch!

"Enough of that only-God drivel! You trying to checkmate *me*?"

As she was twisted around to meet the Mind-Master's glare, she shook at the clash of his will against her own; knew herself conquered; realized that, without being dragged, she was returning to the rim of the Wantons' Well. She was going over . . . over . . .

"Might as well end it now as later on," Satan snarled. "How are you going to like it down there, Dolores Trent—down where your world has sent you—down where there is no difference?"

All was over then, thought the spirit-girl. Her baby——

She had heard his laughter quite a while before she began to understand. Opening her eyes, she saw that she still stood on hella-firma. Just in time she must have been willed back from the brink. Near by sat His Majesty, shaken by unholy mirth.

To Dolores this ebullition was more terrifying than his recent wrath. After the emotional stress of the morning, she

felt that she could not endure it. Glancing in the direction taken by the crone-shade, she made out the bent figure dissolving into the brume. She arose and faced her tormentor.

"I wish you wouldn't laugh that way," she said, as calmly as she could.

Satan wiped his eyes.

"I do get so amused at the rages into which I work myself to frighten folk," he commented when able to articulate. "Really, you can't imagine how much fun I have with myself. Pardon me, but I—I just can't get over your——"

"Won't Your Highness oblige me by——"

"My Lowness."

"Your Lowness! Please, Pluto."

"'Please, Pluto!'" Although mocking her, he settled into seriousness. "When you get tricky like that—call me friendly names for favours, you know—it is then that I have hopes of you. Didn't you know that I was only fooling? Do you suppose I'd drop you over the rim before hearing the rest of those griefs to men?"

They returned to the Hell Hawk by way of The Lane of Futile Labours. Although the King seemed minded to hurry, Dolores' steps lagged, so absorbing were the illusory sights on either hand.

In a fenced plot a gardener was on his knees before a line of young rose-plants. A stray weed he pulled with eager hand. The soil around the roots, pulverized already from his diligence, he loosened yet again. Anxiously he lifted his eyes toward the electric sun, the while fanning with his trowel the drooping leaves.

"Soon the rain will fall. It must some time," he mumbled to this plant and to that, as though addressing conscient things. "If you'd bear me just one rose among you, even a half-blown rose——"

So the old dodderer was back to roses again! Thus Satan commented to the girl-shade. Roses were the gardener's speciality. He had begun with them a thousand years before, trying between whiles to bring to bloom every known flower, from shrubs to lowly blue-bells. Interesting to keep count

how often he would revert to the hopeless hope of that one rose!

Over his bench an inventor, twenty years dead, was about to try out a miniature airship over which he had spent the entire span of his endless workdays. As the moment of the test approached, his hands twitched too spasmodically to turn the propeller. Glancing up into the censorious smile of the royal bystander, his face contorted by an expectancy painful to see, he gained control. Next moment the invention which he had quitted earth too soon to see perfected lay on the ground. At his touch the model had quitted the bench, hovered briefly in mid-air, then dropped.

An artist mixed paints on her palette. Over an impressionistic study of the lurid skyscape she worked, inspired by sheer necessity. But the colours faded to a monotone, no matter how thickly she laid them on.

Long before the end of the Lane, Dolores had begun to understand. That one rose never would bloom. The model plane could not fly. No paint squeezed from Avernian tubes might express the genius of the artist-shade for even one short hour. It was *too late* for the most ambitious spirit to achieve.

Shadows from her sombre thoughts were in the glance uplifted to her guide.

"You have the askingest eyes," observed he. "Very well. I'll give you a lift through the Lane of Labours. Of course it is all illusion. The gardener imagines the weeds, the inventor the crash of his plane, the artist her chromatic pigments. What we see in them is what they believe of themselves. Just as well might they imagine success, except for—— For what now, do you suppose?"

"For fear?"

Satan nodded. "Thought you'd get the idea if I gave you time. A singer fears that her voice will fail. It fails. A woman with child fears for its inheritance. She bears a defective. A sea captain fears that he cannot manage his crew. From his weakness springs their mutiny. Except for fear in the heart, you earthlings could become a race of gods."

"Gehenna, then, is thwarted hope?"

"Gehenna is preconceived failure, built up on my revised

theory, where-there's-hope-there's-life! Diverts me how they try and try, foredoomed by self-doubt. They don't and won't know before That Day that they must fail. Absolutely to know this would be——"

"Hell?" Dolores' lips shuddered the word.

"Hell will be despair. There none will try."

"And—and Heaven?"

With the query, the girl-soul's eyes were lighted by a vague gleam—a suggestion that night is not so much the end of a day past as the beginning of one to come.

"Heaven?" His Majesty scowled down at her. "Heaven, it is supposed, will be progress—assured realization. Tell me, did you ever find anything in realization?"

"No, not yet. But without faith——"

"A synonym for Heaven, that 'not yet'!" he retorted intolerantly. "As for faith—bah! Faith is the fear of fools."

Hurrying her toward the waiting Hawk, he broached: "I am going to fly you back to Apollyon Palace over a section which I think will enlarge your conception of my place. Everything is at a standstill down here, *except*——"

The eager look which completed his sentence filled Dolores with uneasiness greater than that aroused by the futile labours of the Lane. Evidently he, master of these denizens of doom, believed in some personal achievement. Did he also hope in vain? Last night she had crucified her modesty of soul in the hope of saving herself and her baby from punishment. Would her effort fail? And John Cabot—oh, surely the faith with which she clung to that hope of one day seeing John again was not the fear of a fool!

The apprehension seen in all faces that morning now looked from out her own. She felt much as when told the nature of her employment in Vincent Seff's shop that long-ago day on Earth, after she had spent the sum advanced to her. What price was to be exacted of her in this new position? What meant that studying regard of her—what the varied encouragements which depressed her with sensations more heavy, if less intelligible, than any of those proved prescience in her former state?

Until *when* ?
If *what* ?
Except—— ?

" Except me."

Not until they were cleaving the air directly beneath the high-swung sun, did the King complete his suspended sentence. Like mere specks behind and below them were the cages and huts, the caves and wells and morasses of the lower bad-lands. On either side discernible objects blended into the sand sites reserved for expansion. Ahead, farther than the mind could think, stretched yet more distances. Truly a Cyclopean panorama, this topographical review of the hope-hell of the lost !

Dolores could not regard merely the spectacle. Even as she gazed forward and back, her heart ached over such few individuals as she had seen, and over the many she had not seen. Some, mayhap, deserved their fate, although most, she felt sure, were as was she, victims of the shallow judgments of men. Would they, *could* they endure until the Supreme Judge entered court ? Could she ?

At the burn of dry tears within her eyelids, she remembered Satan's exultation over the weeping angels. Even should she weep, her tears, like the crone-soul's, would be salt—would tantalize, rather than refresh. She choked back her emotion.

" A pretended interest in one's escort is more gracious than none at all."

As from a distance, she heard Satan's reproach. Recalling her thoughts, she concentrated on what he was saying.

" How they hate me, yet how much more they fear me, my fiends ! Certainly I have the advantage over rulers of Earth in needing no secret service protectorate. Unfortunately for my subjects, I am immortal. They know that they cannot kill the Master Mind, that mine is the only spirit in Gehenna to which achievement is possible. That fact I prove to them hourly, through their sufferings. They call me The Destroyer, yet am I their one great hope of salvation."

The boast puzzled Dolores. " The Destroyer a saviour ? "

He showed surprise at her surprise.

"You don't like me, my dear shade, or you'd show a more credulous interest in my small confidences about myself."

"I *am* interested, really."

"Although you don't like me? Never mind. I could make you do so—could make you love me if I chose. But I don't wish to *make* you. Hell knows I've got my pride!"

He gave up to an attack of his lonely chortles. Evidently he had "amused" himself again. Next moment he seized the point of his Vandyke and straightened his countenance to excessive length.

"Get behind me, ignoble impulse of pique! Mine other cheek, turn thou for a blow!" Lowering his face to hers, he added, most unexpectedly: "I don't mind admitting that you make it hard for me to be mean. Except that I have a reputation for meanness which I must deserve—anyhow, it's your turn to tell me something nice."

"But why——" stammered Dolores. "I don't understand——"

"Oh, yes you do. Something nice that you think about me."

Despite what she knew of him, the girl-shade was caught by something of his own amusement at himself.

"I think," she offered, "that at times you seem a very great deal of a human being."

Clamping the plane's "joy stick" between his knees, His Majesty threw up both hands toward the glory of his imitation sky.

"As bad as that?" he exclaimed.

She could see, through his affected horror, that he was complimented.

"For the smallest of favours, even though forced, I thank you," he said, with an appearance of sincerity. "That, my child, is what I'd like best to seem to be—just a long-lasting man."

"*My child!*" The unctuousness of his two words of address, emphasized by his smug contemplation of her face, made Dolores turn away with a new uneasy wonder. Some one on Earth had called her "my child" with that same accent and gaze. *Who?*

Her distraction irritated him.

" Don't sit there looking like a magazine cover. Your profile is odiously seraphic. If I'd seen it first, I'd not have given you a second thought. . . . That's better. . . . When I compare that asking look in your eyes with the dear little wrinkles around your mouth—those *dear* little wrinkles——"

So long and so strangely did he continue to contemplate her that Dolores risked his displeasure by covering her face with her hands. Again he surprised her.

" Your methods are unlike those of any in the whole Well of Wantons. At times it is hard to believe the worst of you. Looking straight into your eyes, one sees——"

His pause she interrupted with an almost beseeching reminder.

" Does one—what ? "

" Well, what has been your experience ? Doesn't one ? "

His laugh was an insult.

Denied the eyes in whose royal purple shadows lurked " that look " which, underscored by the lines about her smileless mouth, had got on his imagination, he soon tired of the joke at her expense.

" You are a helliot for looks, no doubt of that," he remarked crisply. " What I want to know is—can you *fight* ? "

" Fight, Your—Your Lowness ? Why should I fight ? "

He did not answer either himself or her. His manner changed. He appeared chiefly impatient.

" You'd think that I could manufacture time, the way I'm wasting it. With the crimes of the mortal world awaiting my direction, I carry you through this tour. Not that I think the education will be wasted on you. My original conviction is strengthened. But I must get back."

" I am ready to return at once, sir."

" You look more than ready. This is a case, however, where the longest way round may prove the shortest home."

He put The Hawk to its highest speed. It seemed that they might beat the winds in any race, beat thought, beat even light. With the edges of cleft air, Satan's instructions cut into Dolores' consciousness.

" The scenes we're about to skirt will demonstrate why I've

striven through the ages for numbers. Look you toward the east."

Urged by a certain hard-suppressed excitement in his voice, Dolores strained her sight in the direction of his gesture. Approaching them from the doubtful distances, came a vast company of uniformed shades. On either side stretched countless tents.

"Can it be that you keep up"—she hesitated over the improbable thought—"an army?"

"The Hordes of Hades." The splendid head was thrown back until its red beard stabbed the forward air. The steel-cold voice slashed like a sword. "Focus what imagination you have on their probable numbers—unheard-of billions strong. Try to conceive the ruthlessness possible to demons freed from the fear of death. Consider the impossibility of the most arrant coward's desertion, with my brand stamped on his brow."

In her effort to obey, expression failed the spirit-girl.

Glancing around at her, Satan frowned. "Nothing to say, as usual? You've not yet suspected, then, that the basic principle of Gehenna is militaristic? Where would any autocrat be without defence for his autocracy?"

"This army—of what race is it?"

At the simplicity of her question, His Highness laughed. "Do you think for a moment that a one-race army would be enough for me? I may have been wrong since birth, but I'm right in the safety of numbers. The hosts below are conscripted from the best bad men since Cain—Europeans and Americans from Japheth; Arabs, Jews, *et al.*, from Shem; Egyptians and Africans from Ham. Not chosen by God, but by me, and on the principle that in the heart of every man, be he white or black, red or yellow, is the incipient germ of fratricide. Might is right—a slogan of my coinage. Hell over all, say I!"

With face working and eyes blinded by their own flare, he applied shaking fingers to the speed buttons of the aeromobile.

"Truth is *stronger* than fiction," he declared. "Down there you see a suggestion of the truth about me. But I need more

man-made demons to demonstrate that truth. I must have more, more—and yet more!"

His intensity affected Dolores like the winds which had chilled her to the soul on her recent trudge through the Valley of Death.

"I depend upon the beast that is in every man, as shown by the way the most fanatic pacifist will fight when forced over the top. But how to gain recruits in bulk, now that the World War has failed!"

As they soared directly over the first encampment, he leaned to the mirror that reflected The Hawk's revolving eyes and began to count in numerals strange to his guest the units in that section. Her brain, so recently finite, grew dizzy in the attempt to follow him.

Evidently he felt gratified by his computations. "Already a creditable army. Nobody but the Great-I-Am knows the trouble I've had recruiting them, and He only because He has been kept so busy trying to block me. From the first, I've counted on wearing Him out—getting Him so tired that He'll be willing to let Nature take its course. It looked recently as though I'd succeeded, but I am beginning to fear—what with peace blanketing all the bad old predatory instincts and temperance creeping like a tidal wave over the mortal world—that my time is getting short. I must think—must concentrate."

As he relapsed into what seemed urgent introspection, a ruddy mist began to emanate, first from his head, then his body. Open as was the air-scape and swift their flight, a noxious odour spread.

For a space they alternated tail-spins and nose-dives with loops in the lurid altitudes. Dolores, from her earth-habit of fear, cried out against such recklessness.

His Majesty's dazed look suggested that her protest had recalled him from some evil spell. The emanations from his body thinned and ceased.

"Too much joy in our ride, my child? You'd forgive my abstraction if you realized how I am ulcering from the trick the teetotallers put over on me—and only because I felt too strong to fear their weakness."

A scorching glance he threw across at her, as though she had spoken objection.

"You've got to take what you get when you're dead, you know. *I* am what most of you get. All I need to force the rookies of yonder army to my will is their own consciences. The morale is the only thing. They know what they deserve, and I am their only chance of escaping it. It means something to those Relicts of Right for me to remark, 'To hell with you!'"

The girl-shade's eyes stung, not so much from the rush of torrid air as the effort to face his blighting gaze. Her conceptions were overtaxed, her mind fagged, her heart hurting with anxiety for the earthlings over whom she still yearned. Realizing that some response was expected of her——

"But why do you train so many millions of the lost?"

"Lost? Under my training they find themselves, just as you soon shall be finding yourself and your powers for evil." He eyed her yet more tryingly. "Why do you suppose, now?"

"Is it"—Dolores shuddered—"to send their spirits in force to the living world, to conquer all that are left? At the Mystery Gate I was told that none might return who had crossed into Shadow Land."

"You were told aright. The conflict for which my troops are training will be in the Inter-World—an irresistible onslaught of fiendishness. Do you suppose that I've been straining my inventiveness all these centuries to arouse the beast in every man simply for amusement? I have not yet begun to show my power. But it won't be long now to wait."

"And then?" Shaken by dread greater than her comprehension, she shrank away from him. "Do you speak of your Great Intention?"

His look leaped after her, a devouring fire.

"I speak of a night far spent—of a day that is at hand. I speak of earth and water and air that shall cleave together as component parts of chaos, of heavens that shall stretch out 'like a curtain,' of hordes that shall put on the 'armour of light.' No time to call on the gods of men in my surprise. No pause for a thought of reprieve. If love generates electricity,

what of hate? Hate shall be the ammunition of the great drive. A fanflare of poisoned thoughts shall open the fire. Once the lapsing fear for mortality is burned to dross, my demands shall be granted. You dare to probe the mystery of my Intention? Keep those asking eyes of yours on me, Dolores Trent. *I* am the mystery of Mystery Land!"

Loud he hurled this declaration into the heated air. As though spoken into some megaphone of surpassing conductive power, it reverberated away and away, down and down. As its message, lightning licked the air, to be gulped in turn by thunder. From below echoed tumult so great that the atmospheric response rumbled as from volcanic eruptions. Shrieks arose from the Hadean hordes.

His Majesty, slowing and steadying the craft as a bird holds poise, pulled the girl-soul to her feet and with her leaned to watch, first-sight, the troops rushing into formation. Soon sight of the units was cut off by slashing swords of light. A fetid gas arose from the onrush.

In an ague of undefined terror, Dolores felt herself further shaken by the clutch on her arm; heard the Prince of the Power of the Air again give himself over to mirth.

"Fool fiends, they hear my voice and think it is That Day! Not bad for an impromptu practice drive, eh? Once all fear is drilled out of them, once their numbers are complete, once the full force of that gas is turned on—— Ah, nothing and none may stand against the hate of Hell!"

Skimming the upper air toward the palace, he centred his attention on the cowering convert to his power.

"Whether you rise to the rôle in this new comedy divine for which I am considering you, depends upon yourself," he told her. "Your first séance was one of fair success. But nerve yourself for to-night lest you fail to entertain. After what you have seen to-day, you'd not wish to fail?"

The weight of her responsibility crushed out her reply.

"I should not dare to fail."

He nodded, his hope evidently strengthened, as hers had been weakened, by the morning's flight.

"That Day you ask about—I do not understand myself why it has been postponed so long. Do you suppose——"

As if startled by his own thought, Satan caught her hand with a touch that pained like a burn, yet left no mark. His voice sagged superstitiously as he finished :

" Do you suppose it could have been ordained that I should wait—for *you* ? "

CHAPTER VIII

OFTEN during that first night after the *dénouement* at Seff's, Dolores kept thinking of her father lying underneath his sod blanket out in the rain. Indeed, she did not sleep until after the rain had stopped.

Comfort came with oblivion. In her dreams somebody strong, young and ardent entered her door as though he had the right—the love-lad who, in a vision more real than the shameful reality of the store-stage scene, had crossed to her side from the stranger who had rescued her. Through the narrow space between the wall and her cot he slipped ; sat looking at her from the single stiff chair ; at last leaned down and, ever so tenderly, kissed her on the lips.

A peremptory knock awakened her. In the coarse night-gown, which had felt like the embrace of a mother after those cobwebby things at Seff's, she opened the door a crack upon the young blonde hair and old brunette face of her landlady.

" Your week being up to-day, there'll be no refund. Your trunk not yet having come, it won't take you long to pack and go."

" Go where ? " Dolores asked.

The reply, although characteristically indirect, was clear. " Being raised decent myself and with God's help running a decent house, it's not for me to say more than that out you're going, bag and baggage."

Had some one from the lingerie shop acquainted the lady of the house with the news of the fiasco of yesterday—perhaps Vincent Seff himself ? Did he mean to discredit her further—to hound her with advances or reproach ?

The possibility determined her against any attempt at explanation or appeal. Beyond this decision she had not time

to think, until she found herself seated in a one-arm chair of a self-service restaurant. Beside her stood the alligator bag. In her palm lay the residue of her recent wealth, two quarters; a substantial surplus, however, as compared with the solitary nickel expended for the nectarine that had decided her engagement only one week before.

Coffee and crullers—a delicious breakfast when sweetened with the thought that she was released from her hideous bondage, the thought that she was free! With the weak brew came strong thoughts.

Why had she discounted her heritage of education? Why consider work in factories or shops when she spoke three languages and read in five? Surely Trevor Trent, acknowledged a brilliant translator by his severest critics, had not shunted his latter-day work upon her shoulders for naught! She would look higher for employment; would climb to a place where morals were disciplined by minds.

She was sipping from the thick cup the last thin drop. A chunky man, in rising from the next chair, dropped his newspaper on the floor. Of such figure that he might not recover it without inconvenience, he stepped upon and over it. Dolores picked it up and called to him. But either he was through with it, or did not wish to concede his lack of equipoise. Despite the waddle with which he went out the door, Dolores regarded him as a god—the paper his gift. She began to turn its pages in search of the "Help Wanted" columns.

As it chanced, she did not read the news pages. A picture on the last page distracted her—a bold, drawn-from-life sketch of herself, which was its own indictment of the flimsy garb in which she was portrayed.

Dolores' pleasure in the meal receded into the distant past. Gone were the strong thoughts sipped from the weak brew. Of what use to look higher when placarded as so low? Anyone might recognize her now! With her paper napkin she brushed away the mist that had gathered before her eyes, and bent to the type which surrounded the cut.

Dolores Trent, subject of the sketch, was recommended to the reader's interest as the principal in a lingerie-shop scandal reported in detail in another column. That the incident was

to be made the cause of a reform in the use of human merchandise was promised in a spirited interview with John Cabot, noted financier, who had preferred a charge of assault against Vincent Seff, the offending shopkeeper.

In the column referred to, the girl found a detailed report of the impromptu scene which had followed the playlet of " The Little Old Lady of Lorraine," a paragraph of speculation upon her own disappearance, and another which declared that the beautiful Mrs. John Cabot was confined to her home in a state of nervous collapse because of the notoriety brought on the family by her husband's behaviour.

Dolores crumpled the newspaper and threw it into the self-service trash basket. She had better cause to relinquish it than the over-fat god!

Out upon the street, she foresaw other relinquishments. Small use was there for her to seek employment until to-day's news had passed into the discard of several yesterdays. Doubtless this story, rather than direct word from the Seff shop, had brought about the morning's summary eviction. Well might she expect to remain roomless until a lapse of time had lessened chances of comparison between her face and the sketch. More harm than help had been worked by the volunteer protectorate of Mr. John Cabot, who unfortunately was of social importance, or he would not have been given such space in the news. And that imagined kiss which had soothed her slumbers in the pristine dawn—why its false assurance of security?

Was it fancy or fact that people were staring at her? Probably she did look strange. Well-dressed young girls did not saunter, travelling bags in hand. Not noting in what direction, she hastened her steps. She must appear to be bound somewhere, as if to meet some one.

In truth, she was. She felt her arm seized in a strong grip; heard a voice in brogue reproving her.

" Battlin' bantham, woman, where'd you get it so early in the mornin'—or was it, now, so late last night?"

In cross-cutting a juncture of car-tracks already congested, Dolores had tripped and been forcefully thrown into the arms of a policeman. As he escorted her towards the kerb, she assured him that his first conclusion about her was wrong.

She had been trying to think and hurry at the same time, that was all.

He was a fine specimen of the city's choice, young, well set up, weather bronzed. He begged her pardon for his mistake. When he turned to leave her, Dolores had a sudden sense of loss.

"If you please——"

She caught his arm and gazed up at him, her lips uncertain over what next to say.

He showed surprise at her touch and look, but leaned to her. And as he leaned, red colour waved across his tan.

"Faith," he said, "I'd hate to meet you goin' home at night!"

At once Dolores regretted her impulse. Unless she wished to be further mistaken, however, she must continue.

"If you were a girl and needed work," she asked, "how should you go about getting it?"

More slowly than it had come, the colour receded from the young policeman's face. With a deliberate movement, he lifted her hand off his arm.

"Miss, my baby's not a year yet and her eyes are blue, but they've got something the look of your own." He added the advice she had asked. "If I was a girl and a girl like you, sure I'd lock myself in my satchel until I got off Broadway. The satchel I'd check in some regular employment agency, and there I'd stay until I got me job. There's one in the next block, kept by an Irisher friend of mine who ain't half as bad, believe me, as her near-French accent. Ask for Madame Marie Sheehan, née Mrs. Mary Shinn, and tell her that Donovan O'Shay recomminded you to her. Here, I'll write it down."

Upon a police pad whipped from beneath his uniform, he scribbled hurriedly; tore off the sheet; pressed it into her hand. With a kindly "Best o' luck to you, miss," he dived back into the traffic tide.

Dolores watched him disappear in the rush of it with admiration for more than his physique. She appreciated him more than she might have done two weeks ago. A thrill of pride tingled through her that the city, her wonderful New York, could choose so well.

Too bad, when she felt such confidence in him, that his name and the pencilled slip were not the practical present aid he thought! To apply at a "regular" employment agency she would need a better reference than the too graphic one pressed upon her by the morning paper. The slip she placed carefully in her purse. "Née Mary Shinn" she would regard as to-morrow's possibility, rather than the risk of to-day.

But she could and did follow other of his advices. She turned off the broad white way, proved to be so narrow and so dark, and walked briskly eastward.

Perhaps it was the warning of the young Celt, whose girl-baby's eyes had "something the look" of her own, that awoke in Dolores the desire to get back among the sort of people with whom she had lived. Soon she left the cross street and turned north along one of the small-numbered avenues.

Somehow she had ceased to feel the strangeness of her position; scarcely seemed thinking at all, except for a vague worry over why she was not worrying. A quite unreasonable sense that she would happen upon some recognizable sign-post to her immediate future possessed her. She became cheerful, as though some one she trusted had made her a promise of help.

Over the door of a substantial building of corner-lot dignity, she stopped to read this placard:

RESCUE HOME
CHURCH OF ALL MANKIND

Of neither church nor home had she ever heard, but surely she needed rescue as urgently as could any of mankind. She climbed the stone steps; rang the bell.

The door was opened by a negro boy. At her hesitant question he ushered her into a business-like office. A plain-faced girl, who looked to be about Dolores' own age, sat behind a typewriter, busy with a stick of chewing gum and a newspaper. Through an inner door appeared a woman, who introduced herself as the matron of the Home.

Dolores ended her story with the death of her father and her consequent need of a place to stay until she could find employment. She did not notice that the stenographer had left them

until that industriously chewing young person beckoned to the matron from the private office.

"Just wait a few minutes," said the older woman as she rose. "I have an idea we can help you."

Only the buzz of their low-voiced conversation carried through the half-closed door. When the matron returned, she carried in her hand a copy of the same newspaper over which the too-fat god of the restaurant had not dared risk his dignity. She peered over her glasses at the applicant, then through them at the last-page illustration.

"You *are* quick at faces, Gracie," she said to her aide. To Dolores: "I am sorry, Miss—ah—Trent, but I doubt your sincerity in asking our sort of help. Already you have violated our first rule—absolute frankness. This journal explains better than you have done why you need cover in a respectable place. I'm afraid you would not feel at home here."

"Not in them clothes," contributed Gracie.

"My *dear*!" Then again to Dolores: "We do not wish to seem unresponsive to the needs of any unfortunate, but there is a great deal behind my decision. Good morning, Miss Trent."

"Good morning."

Dolores accepted the matron's decision quietly, as she had the previous rebuffs of her life, and started toward the door.

"Are you leaving, my child?"

The voice was strong yet mellifluous. Dolores saw surveying them from the dark background of the hall a man in clerical clothes. He looked to be middle-aged; was of medium height, medium weight, medium colouring. From him, however, flowed an extraordinary personality. No smile showed beneath his brown moustache nor in his agate-coloured eyes, yet he beamed with beneficence.

"Yes, Dr. Willard," the matron answered. "The young lady deliberately deceived me as to her identity. Possibly you have not run through the morning papers. This picture will tell you more quickly than I can explain why I——"

Dolores' impulse was to continue into the hall, but she, as well as the matron, stopped at the clergyman's gesture.

"I haven't seen this one, no," he admitted, studying the

sketch interestedly, then the girl herself. "There are photographs of her, however, in three of the other papers. She is sketchable—very sketchable."

"Knowing how the Home has been imposed upon in the past, you will, I am sure, approve my decision," the matron continued in her calm, competent way. "With so many in it whom we hope to influence to high standards, fair-play forbids that we allow it to be made a free hotel for the convenience of a class who make sport of its object. One bad example spoils a dozen good. I feel very strongly on this subject, doctor."

"Yes, I know. You always feel strongly."

No sarcasm showed in his voice or look. His rebuke was the more telling because so quietly put.

"I shall not interfere with your decision in this case, so far as concerns the Home. But as pastor of the Church of All Mankind, I do not feel that I should permit generalities to affect my personal interest in cases. Surely 'all mankind' includes girlhood, the future of the Nation. Come with me, young lady, I'll see what we can do for you."

Within five minutes, Dolores found herself ushered into the private office of the autocrat of the institution whose doors had been closing upon her.

That there was a crack in her cup of content had come to be a belief of Dolores Trent. From her earliest remembrance there always had seemed to be more or less of seepage. Nevertheless, as protégée of Dr. Alexander Willard—his pet charity, he called her—she felt that the waste should cease.

The Church of All Mankind was a granite pile which "did proud" the outward religious show of its parishioners. From a height it returned serenely the troubled gaze of the Hudson. Its lawns suggested that each blade of grass was especially endowed. Behind the auditorium, with its wide-welcome doors, arched memorial windows, and statued niches for the more generous benefactors, had been erected a two-story utilitarian annexe. Of the same stone and general architectural lines as the church proper, this contained, in addition to lecture, board and office rooms, the pastor's study.

Here Dolores had been installed on the day of her "rescue"

from the East Side Home which ranked first among the charities of All Mankind. Here she soon had learned to manipulate a typewriter with sufficient speed to take letters from dictation, and prepare large-type pulpit copies of the sensational sermons for which Dr. Willard was widely known. Here, in brief, she had mastered the preliminaries of a secretaryship.

Despite frequent praise of her aptitude, her grasp of English, and a natural facility in the creation of oratorical effects, she somehow could not cease to regard her employment as providential, and the reverend doctor as her personal Providence. "The lower they sink, the higher we lift them"—that had been his comment on refusing to hear her attempted explanation of the shop scandal. Neither would he recognize any connection between his initiative in her behalf and the fact that the John Cabots were hereditary members of his congregation.

The rescue matron's bigotry he had deplored as "a pinch" in a nature usually broad. To err was human, he reported himself as having told her, but she must not be human in the same way again. To his wider vision, the Home had been established for just such as Dolores Trent. He had the girl to thank, not she him, for the chance to prove his philanthropy.

Provided with the very sort of work for which she was best fitted, and housed comfortably in the apartment of one of those humbler parishioners always attached to rich churches, she realized one mid-morning, less than a month after the Seff debacle, that she was still in a state of discontent. Alone in the study, she paused in her copying to take herself to task.

Why be so unappreciative as not to be happy? Her immediate predecessor, for whom she had felt inclined to be sorry, had lost the position because, as Dr. Willard explained, she wasn't appreciative.

The only manifest reason for her state of mind lay in the stuffed animals and birds, slain by the distinguished clergyman on his hunting trips, with which the room was given individuality. Over the fire-place was hung a magnificently antlered moose head. A glass-eyed doe, a pair of stuffed foxes, and lesser game, stood about in natural attitudes. From the ceiling

various birds strove on wires, as though in flight. Particularly life-like was a fine specimen of lynx, posed ready to spring just within the door.

Although the new secretary had heard many compliments paid this trophy collection, and had read her employer referred to as "Dr. Nimrod" and "The Hunting Parson," she could not admire in him this passion for the chase. The very naturalness of the pretty creatures made her deplore their cut-short lives.

Often she found herself imagining the one-time fleetness of the doe, or the swish of the wind-spread wings of the golden eagle, wired in an attitude of flying, pitiable because never—never would he fly again. A teasing explanation of the lynx's crouch, made by the doctor to a woman parishioner, sounded tame beside the ferocity which the taxidermist had stuffed into the specimen.

"I keep the big cat by the door to startle my visiting ladies. He gives them a sensation, hurries their blood, makes them natural."

Slavery to such a mission did seem hard on the lynx after the free life he must have led to achieve his immense size. Dolores, yielding to her fanciful mood, crossed the room and offered him a bite from her paper-bag lunch. Crouched beside him, her arm around his neck—— So the minister found her when he brisked in for a belated inspection of the morning mail.

He gave her an indulgent smile as she sprang to her feet, but contributed no remark to her embarrassment.

Dolores had finished taking the daily grist of replies. Dr. Willard was sitting in his chair, his feet on the hassock that stood always before it, looking at her in a way he had to which she could not grow accustomed. Probably he was not thinking of her at all—was mentally selecting the task of next importance. Yet she had grown more than usually restive under his considering gaze, when the beautifully covered top-tones of a soprano voice floated to them from the floor above.

> "*Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,*
> *Lead thou me on. . . .*"

"Ah!" Dr. Willard repeated his smile. "The members of the music committee are having their innings."

"Their innings, doctor?"

"They are holding try-outs for a new soprano. I expect they'll have difficulty in finding one to suit. You like that floating quality? It *is* sort of seraphic. But, dear me, there are so many requirements other than the voice to fill this position, which is probably *the* highest-paid for a church soloist in Greater New York. The committee has heard this young woman several times, and all agree with me except Deacon Brill. He's the only thorn in my flesh on the board."

"He does seem to feel a natural antipathy toward you," Dolores sympathized.

"Very natural." Again that peculiarly indulgent smile. "As he is the central pillar of the church, I try not to collide with him. You see, he has taken this singer—a good-looking girl, in addition to her vocal charms—out to dinner. He says that she won't do."

"Won't do—because he took her out to dinner?"

Before Dr. Willard could explain, his private telephone rang.

"You, at last, my child!" he answered close to the mouthpiece. "So, he's broken out again? I am disappointed. . . . These attacks must be curbed in some way. . . . Always here when you need my advice. . . . Hum-m. . . . The sooner the better."

On hanging up the receiver, he turned with his invariable kindness to Dolores. "It is time you took another of those walks along the Drive that bring the roses into your cheeks. I have an important conference. Stay out in the air an hour or more."

The girl put on her hat and coat. Although she suspected that these absences were not suggested entirely on her account, she was grateful for the half of a thought which made them serve two purposes. As one way of showing her appreciation, she tried always to time her strolls to his convenience rather than her own—to return not too late for the performance of her duties, nor soon enough to interrupt the "conferences" continually held with handsomely gowned women of the congregation. Never did she re-enter the study until the limousine

or touring car which had brought the visitor of the hour had purred away from the side door.

To-day she found the parkway paths delightful. A tinge of winter in the air showed in the white breath of the river craft scudding along against the tide. They always seemed a moral to Dolores, those boats scudding along against the tide.

A thought of the work piled on her desk cut her walk to a scant hour. To her disappointment a grey town-car stood at the annex kerb. Inside she strolled up the corridors, wondering where she should wait. Around a turn she came upon Mr. Brill, the over-fleshed, over-moneyed, and over-old "thorn" in Dr. Willard's flesh. Evidently the deacon was taking a respite from the choir trial to enjoy a cigar. As he had been most affable on the several occasions when she had met him in the pastor's study, Dolores greeted him pleasantly.

"Caught me, didn't you, Miss Trent?" he returned, a bad-boy grin slinking up his baggy cheeks. "You won't tell on a poor addict who prefers Lady Nicotine to *some* lady sopranos?"

"Would that be anything to tell, Mr. Brill? Dr. Willard fairly clouds the study. I don't see any harm in smoking."

"I suppose you don't see harm in anything Dr. Willard does?" Although the "central pillar" shook with mirth, his eyes strained at her through the double-lens glasses fastened with a black ribbon to his lapel. "Wouldn't you, now, join me in a puff or two or three?"

"No, sir. No, thank you," said Dolores.

"Don't be silly. You just said that you see no harm in it. Everybody smokes nowadays, the women as much as the men."

"I know, Dr. Brill, but——"

"But if you have scruples, I'll be only too glad to swear that *I* won't tell. Come, we'll have a little social puff and chat."

Dolores tried to be good-natured, even when he gripped her arm and propelled her into one of the small committee-rooms. When, however, he took from a gold case a slender, perfumed cigarette, lighted it and essayed to place it between her lips, resentment moved her.

"Really, Mr. Brill, I never have smoked and I don't care to begin now. I—I must be getting back to my work."

As she started from the room, he lunged across a table and caught her.

"But I am here to show you how. One lifts the terrible thing in the fingers, so——"

His pudgy left arm caught hers. The smaller fingers of his dimpled right hand pressed up her chin. Thumb and forefinger sought to force between her set teeth the lip-wet smoke. When she realized that his foot was trying to push shut the door, an emotion new to Dolores suddenly controlled her.

"I don't wish to smoke, I tell you. I don't *wish* to be shown."

With the indignant words she beat him upon the face and chest until he fell back gasping.

"Aha, a wild cat is Nimrod's latest trophy—a live one, at that!"

Dolores remembered his chuckled comment after she had forced back the door and rushed from the committee-room. Down the corridor and around a turn to the study she ran, without one backward glance.

Beside the couchant lynx she stopped, startled as looked the couple she had interrupted. Within a scant foot of each other stood Dr. Willard and a woman whom, somewhere, she had seen before.

"I beg your pardon, but I——"

Dolores' apology stumbled as the visitor turned directly toward her. An exquisite creature she was, slender in her close-wrapped blue velvet, a haloesque effect created around her hair by the sunlight shafting from a high window. Her blue, plumed hat lay upon a near-by chair.

Dr. Willard raised a calming hand.

"*My child!*"

The emphasis laid on the familiar words as addressed to the girl gave them an unfamiliar ring.

Then: "Mrs. Cabot, this is my new secretary, Miss Trent."

Dolores' response to the introduction was automatic. She felt confused, distressed. What an evil chance to have cut short a clergyman's advices to the great lady, reported to have

been prostrated already by notoriety suffered on her account! A rude return it seemed to the husband who had befriended her.

CHAPTER IX

DOLORES need have felt no anxiety over what she should say. Mrs. Cabot said everything—and more.

"You philanthropists, will you ever get enough?"

The short-lipped, mouse-toothed, childlike smile with which she turned from her pastor to settle her hat in the mirror was reflected toward them. At the door she bowed composedly to Dolores and gave Dr. Willard her hand.

"In return for your wise counsel over my domestic troubles, dear doctor, the favour you ask is small. Trust me. I'll steal upstairs, as if overwhelmingly attracted by the music. But remember—you have assured me that you like the quality of her singing voice only because some on'e else does *not* like the super-quality with which she speaks.'

After she had gone, Dr. Willard sank into the padded leather chair and gazed out the window. He looked disturbed; bit his lip, as if trying to control vexation; waggled his right foot as he was wont to do when nervous.

Dolores crossed the room, hesitated a moment before him, then sank upon the hassock placed conveniently in front of his chair.

"Scold me—I'd rather you would!" she exclaimed, a catch in her voice. "I shouldn't have burst in on your conference in that way, but I just couldn't help it. I was so angry that I—I——"

"Angry? *You*, my child?"

So cleared of all vexation were the yellow-brown eyes bent to her imploring look, that Dolores began to stammer out the cause of her agitation. When her head dropped to her hands upon his knee, he reached out and patted her on the shoulder, very, very kindly.

"Poor orphan. Poor child," he encouraged her. "I am indignant that such a scene could be forced upon an inexperienced girl within these walls. No matter how great may

be Deacon Brill's influence in the temporal affairs of the church, I shall bring him to book in my own time and my own way. Do not fear to tell me all."

Dolores told him.

Shaken from her usual reticence, she also told him of her feeling of aloneness since her father had died, and the positive fear that was growing in her—fear of the world and its ways.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "the unpleasant things which have happened to me are partly my own fault."

"Your fault? You feel that you have faults?" A glint lighted the agate gaze as he questioned her.

"I lack," she confessed, "religion. It was left out of my life. My father was, I think, embittered against it. He was very good to me, but he didn't send me to Sunday school any more than to public school. Perhaps if he had, I'd have grown up more like other girls—more self-reliant, less afraid."

"And less yourself," he objected. "You have, I think, remarkable self-control."

"You don't know how glad I am to hear you say so, Dr. Willard. That has been my only religion—self-control. It is very strange that a person to whom I never spoke—whom I never saw but once—gave me the ambition to learn it."

At his show of interest, Dolores recited the incident. "I was quite a small girl, eight or nine, I guess. My father had left me to wait in a railway station one day. I was worried because often he—because I was afraid we'd miss our train. There was a lady sitting near me, also waiting. I took to watching her.

"She was attractive and wore nice clothes. I became fascinated by the way she breathed, not out and in, as I had supposed all people did, but up and down. The lace jabot on her breast would move up and down, up and down. Of course, as I grew older, I realized that she breathed that way from tight lacing. But at the time it seemed to me more refined than the common way. Then I saw that she was going to sneeze. I've always hated to see people sneeze—they make such a fuss. But this lady prepared. She was quite calm. The jabot lifted high with the breath she took. At the vital moment she was ready."

" And did she sneeze, my poor child ? "

" Oh yes, doctor, but so neatly. She just leaned out and did it without any fuss at all. Afterward, she didn't sniff or even wipe her eyes. She was very wonderful. I often think of her."

Shyly Dolores glanced up to see if the great intelligence had anticipated her point.

" The station was draughty. When my turn came, I breathed up and down and prepared. I made up my mind to sneeze in the lady's way. And I did. Afterward, the ambition to sneeze in her way applied to other things—decided me to take the draughts of life neatly—to be prepared and make no fuss. I try and try, Dr. Willard. But I guess that self-control is not enough. Don't you think people would understand me better if I had your religion ? Is it too late for me to learn it now ? "

" Emphatically not, you fatherless child." The doctor apparently had been touched by her conversational offering. Real feeling quivered on the face bent over hers. " And there are other comforts it is not too late for you to learn. Lean your lonely heart against mine. Let me teach you a father's love."

" If you would—oh, if you only would ! " She seized his hands and pressed one cheek against them. " It is so easy to learn from one you absolutely trust."

" Don't trust anyone absolutely. I fear at times that your rating of me is too high." Humility tore from her reverential regard the pastor's eyes, although his hands shook with appreciation of her praise. " Remember how everything finite that goes up must come down. Only the soul can ascend and stay on high. The flowers that lift their heads to bloom must wither and die. The lightest feather in the most buoyant breeze eventually returns to the earth from which it blew."

" But it is my soul you will exalt, dear Dr. Willard."

At her reminder, one of his hands moved to where its palm fitted over the ball of her shoulder.

" Let me be a father to you. Yes, let me be a father to you," he kept repeating, while his palm pressed her shoulder, and began to move around and around.

" And you'll teach me your religion ? "

Dolores' head was thrown back in exhilarating hope. As one performs small acts in the largest moments, she plucked a long, silver-gold hair off the black cloth of his coat. In the same motion, despite her boasted control of impulse, her hand continued around his neck.

"*My* religion, child? I'll gladly teach if you—if you care to learn," he responded, drawing her to him in a closer embrace.

"It means safety to me—everything. You won't find me dull. I believe I shall learn readily from you."

"I believe—you could." The palm over her shoulder pressed harder; moved faster. "But, dear daughter, don't place me or any man upon too high a pedestal, lest we fall—lest we fall."

"I am sure——" To avoid contradicting her mentor, the pupil altered the form of her statement. "I *hope* that you never will fall."

"And I hope—you don't get—that hope!"

With the hoarse exclamation, Dr. Willard rose to his feet, drew the girl after him, and clutched her with a vehemence that made them stand as one. Before she could draw away her face, or realize that suddenly she was again afraid, she felt his moustache against her cheek.

"We'll seal the bargain, my child. Just the kiss of a father—the kiss of a father," he rasped close to her ear.

The insult crushed upon her mouth was not, however, fatherly. The unequal struggle started by it was of no spiritual excitation. How she wrenched herself away from him; how he headed off her rush toward the door; how she eluded his clutching pursuit in and out among the other young animals he had trapped; how she escaped from their stumble over the couchant lynx, left him panting on the floor, ran screaming like the hunted thing he had made of her into the corridor and up the first flight of stairs——

The full horror of what had happened did not come to her until she stood before the astonished music committee. Her hair dishevelled, her blouse torn open down the front, her discretion in shreds, she flamed upon them.

"When even a minister of the gospel can't be trusted, where—*where* am I to go?"

That Mrs. Cabot was with them further unnerved her. Collapsing into a chair, struggling with hysteria, she sobbed out her denunciation. When able to look among the faces of the group gathered about her, she saw that all were grave excepting two. Mrs. Cabot looked entertained, Mr. Brill triumphant.

The manner that befits an occasion gave the deacon greater weight as he turned to address his colleagues.

"Brothers, I have long suspected that the feet of the god set up by this congregation are of clay. I hesitated to voice so distressing a thought, lest I err. None of you, however, can doubt the testimony just heard and seen. The hardest-hearted of you can have only pity for the courageous young woman who has exposed this aide of the Evil One. Dumbfounded though you may be, I ask you to act with me now—*at once*. There is not space within these hallowed walls to house both him and me. Five minutes should give him time to choose between a Church trial or immediate resignation. In either case, it is important that we give the news to Park Row at once, before he who is so fond of sensation has time to discredit us. Brothers, shall we wait upon the pastor in the sanctum which he has so disgraced?"

While the honest laymen of All Mankind discussed this drastic proposal, Brill addressed himself to the girl.

"A man can scarcely be expected to understand the outraged state of your feelings, Miss Trent. But at least I realize that you must shrink from the idea of facing that wolf in sheep's clothing again. I'll send your wraps up here. Also, it seems to me inadvisable for your own sake that you remain in the employ of the Church. In this envelope I have sealed the equivalent of a month's wages. . . . Oh, do not hesitate to take it! Notice or money is due a dismissed employee."

Glancing over-shoulder and seeing that the committee had congregated near the door in animated argument, he made his considerable figure the silencer of a low-voiced apology.

"Sorry I teased you about the cigarette, little girl. I had an object which you did not at the time suspect—to discover, through you, more about that scoundrel. I was trying you out, just as the soprano was being tried out upstairs, to see whether he had got you into the bad habit of smoking. Didn't

blame you at all when you scratched and bit, so you mustn't hold it against me. You appear to be a young woman of sterling character—a mighty good little girl."

Bending and beaming, he patted her on the head. The eyes wontedly so nondescript above the billowy face and cascade of chins, squinted through their double lenses benevolently.

"You'll be wanting other employment," he added in still lower tones, as if not wishing his right hand to know. "Now, I advise something of a—well, you know, of a more secular nature. Take this card, my dear. See that you arrive at the address on it about ten to-morrow morning. Perhaps I'll be able to find you a berth where I can keep a friendly eye on you. You'll come?"

As he waddled out in the wake of his peers, Dolores heard him continue: "About that matter of the soprano, brothers, I withdraw my objection. Trouble often brings a change of heart, and I feel that we should stand together now in all things. Especially since Sister Cabot is so decided in her agreement with you, I'll try to enjoy the young lady's voice, although I still think her too old for that churchly, newly-awakened-soul effect. However, I always hold myself open to conviction."

She also overheard his throaty chortles over the taunt of Mrs. Cabot: "To younger and prettier convictions, you mean, Deacon?"

Alone, Dolores stared dazedly down at the envelope and card she held. Things happened so suddenly, once they began, she thought. Only this morning she had chided herself for discontent with her settled state. Now everything was unsettled again. As she had cried out to the committee, what manner of man dared she trust?

One of them had answered. The card——

Up to the light she held it. Upon it was engraved the name and down-town business address of Deacon Brill himself.

"You'll come?" he had asked, voice, eyes, billows exuding loving kindness.

Even more urgently she asked herself: "Shall I go?"

Next morning Dolores bought all the papers, determined to learn the worst. Several of the more conservative merely

mentioned that the Rev. Dr. Alexander Willard had resigned the pastorate of the Church of All Mankind. One suggested significant detail behind the surprising act. Still another stated that the Eminent Divine would demand an ecclesiastical trial, and introduced the name of the young secretary whom he, disregarding a certain premonishing contretemps, had sheltered within his Church Home.

The most sensational journal of all uncovered a photograph of the young lady in the case, and reviewed the lingerie-shop scandal referred to by the discredited clergyman. This was featured beneath the heading:

TOO STRONG FOR
DR. NIMROD'S SPORTING BLOOD

Would the denomination he had served allow his reputation to be charred by the brand he had tried so conscientiously to pluck from the burning? So the Reverend Willard was quoted as having demanded, in an exclusive interview. Would any fair-minded congregation take, against his, the word of an adventuress who so lately had been the example for a reform movement instituted by one of their most prominent parishioners, Mr. John Cabot? Was he to be blamed that he had assumed the sincerity of All Mankind's ideals and had sought to make his charity wide as its word? To save himself, for the sake of any future good that he might do, he would reveal, if forced, the overtures toward him of this unholy creature. As a sacred duty he would show his world which of the two was more sinned against than sinning.

"A menace to men"—as such Dolores Trent was pointed out by the reprimanding finger of the Press.

Deacon Brill's threat of Park Row had swerved from the sheep-clothed wolf to her. Whether or not Dr. Willard lost his pulpit, the harm to his secretary was already done.

In the little room found for her by her quandam benefactor, a room in whose chintz-hung cosiness she had delighted, Dolores decided upon her immediate course. There were young daughters in the family of the poor parishioner. For their sakes, she would "fold her tents" before asked to do so, and silently as she might, steal away. Thanks to savings

from her salary, and that final payment in lieu of "notice," she was more affluent than ever before in her life. She would go, then. But where?

Opening her purse, she took out a business card and considered it as well as its kind-spoken donor. She would come? That had been Deacon Brill's last question. In the absence of alternative——

With sudden decision, she tore the card into bits and flung them into the waste basket. Probably she didn't understand men—that had been her thought. But she *did* understand and *did* believe in the up-floating purity of the voice of that soprano who had gone to dinner with the music committee's over-fleshed chairman—the young lady who wouldn't do.

No alternative?

The moment she cast aside what had seemed her only chance, she found another in her fingers. She had almost forgotten the address given her by Patrolman Donovan O'Shay and tucked away in her purse. For weeks she had not thought of his "near-French" friend, Madame Marie Sheehan. Discounted by distance was her reason for postponing a visit to the employment office. Since her own judgment seemed always wrong, she would try the policeman's. She would check herself in her "satchel" until the fates, "née Mary Shinn," should see fit to provide.

"Madame's" French certainly was bad. There were advantages, however, in the long lapses between the selection of one word and her advance to the next. Dolores had ample time to translate the high-voiced utterances overheard from the inside room.

"Ah, but no! I fit the applicant to the position, not the position to the applicant. So long you have been lacking the employment. So quite joyful should you be for anything. The call for companions is rare, very. One, two, three applicants have I booked before that you come. This position I so kindly extend——"

"I tell you, nothing doing!" the interruption came in emphatic, current American. "I was a governess for two days once. I tell you I'd rather try the streets. Children ain't human beings. They're devils, say I."

"Ah, but no, *no*! More unto an angel is this exquisite child. Could you once see those curls of gold, those turquoise eyes! The parents are from money made, and them I have promised a governess to-day."

"Well, redeem your promise at the expense of somebody else. I'll be back to-morrow for my job. Good day to you, *Madame* Shinn!"

If the sneer of this would-be companion, thought Dolores, was a sample of her companionableness, small wonder that she was out of a position.

No hesitation held the girl in waiting. Ignorant of the rules of such offices, unmindful of the dour-visaged hope-forlorn awaiting their turn on the benches of the outer room, she brushed past the departing aspirant into madame's presence.

"Won't you let me have that position?" she asked in lieu of introduction. "I love children. I know I'd suit. I don't care so much about the pay or——"

"So too fast you go!" interrupted née Shinn. "You look but the infant yourself. And the qualifications——"

"Of course you couldn't be expected to know it yet, dear madame, but I am qualified. As for education—— Listen, I will speak in three languages!" Under impetus of the unwonted initiative ruling her, Dolores switched from English to French, then to Italian as she urged: "I am young, yes, but that is why I need a home. What companionship would be safer for me than that of a child such as this golden-haired little girl you describe? Once madame was as young as I. Was she ever, perchance, alone in the world?"

"Mademoiselle is marvellously a linguist," admitted Mrs. Shinn, although confusion from more than the foreign words sat upon her broad features. "Have you also the excellent references?"

Momentarily the girl's new-found assurance stumbled. Then again was she inspired.

"I have, indeed, an excellent one."

Her Spanish—a creditable attempt at a fourth language—might not have been comprehensible to the agency woman, but Donovan O'Shay's scribble was. A good-natured smile waved in like a flag her native tongue.

" A friend of Don's are you, then, my *cherie* ? Sure, if you're as good as that boy's heart you're O.K. ! "

Motherly instructions and pencilled directions followed Dolores' payment of the fee. If she'd just " speak up," now, to Mrs. M. P. Morrison of No. —— Fifth Avenue as she had to madame herself, she stood a chance of overcoming any natural objections to her youth and inexperience.

The glow of anticipated victory did not leave Dolores' face at first sight of Mrs. Morrison's mansion, although it was something of a shock. Nothing should frighten her now. She had made one friend—a woman friend. She might—she *must* make another.

Briskly, as though prepared for the block-front display of lawn, unusual even on this avenue of extravagance, she turned in through the centre gateway. Under the bare trees which she knew to be so costly a luxury, she hurried, as if fearful that some late-clinging leaf might mistake her importance and honour her head. Past clumps of drying hydrangeas, past a fountain which still defied the freeze of winter with rainbow spray, past a marble dryad of a cynical smirk, afterwards acutely remembered, she found herself confronted by a well-balanced marble pile. Without a pause, lest trepidation should weaken her, she descended the steps to the ground-floor entrance and pressed the bell.

An elderly gentleman, of such distinguished appearance that she felt he must be the master of the house himself, opened the door. After inspection of Madame Sheehan's card, he escorted her across a galleried entrance hall of a luxury and loftiness wellnigh incredible. At the rear, he threw open the door of a small parlour, cheerful from its window-boxed blooming geraniums. Mrs. Morrison would be down, he told her.

Dolores' wait was not long. The tap-tap of high heels upon the marble foyer outside brought her to her feet. She " spoke up " according to instructions, and tried to recall the assurance which had carried her past the rules—*and* the French—of née Shinn. She stressed her education and the " way " she was said to have with children, especially with little girls.

The more she talked, however, the more serious looked the woman whom she hoped to make her friend.

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Morrison, "that the case has been misrepresented. Strange, when I explained to Madame Sheehan myself, on my trip among the agencies this morning! The child for whom I need a governess is not a girl, and has anything but the amiable disposition accredited to him."

"Madame's French must have misled me." Dolores chose to ignore the particulars of "those curls of gold,those turquoise eyes," evidently mere chimera of a Hibernian imagination. At the suggestion of failure she all the more craved success. "It does not especially matter that he is not a girl. He is a child, isn't he?"

Mrs. Morrison glanced suspiciously at her. "I don't know—the last governess called him a fiend. You are different from the sort we have had, and expected again. I scarcely know what to say. You look a sweet-dispositioned girl, but you are very young. Perhaps I'd better leave the decision to——"

Laughter and spirited repartee in the voices of a man and a woman sounded pleasantly from the hall. They seemed to decide her. She arose; crossed to the door; and paused briefly to say: "His mother has just come in from her ride. Perhaps she will speak with you."

"His mother? But—I thought—that you——"

Dolores, again alone, began to understand. Of course Mrs. Morrison was the housekeeper. That explained the first-floor parlour, the neat black taffeta of her dress, and her subdued manner. A third application for the coveted position must be made!

When, next moment, the door was pushed wide, she did not rise. She had not the strength. A woman in a smart habit, of black velvet coat and white cloth breeches, had clattered in, crop in hand.

"Master Jack's mother will speak with you, Miss Trent," introduced the housekeeper.

Still Dolores found her limbs weaker than her will. She clung to both arms of the chair and waited for the real sponsor for the "fiend-child" to speak.

She—the mother—was Mrs. Cabot.

CHAPTER X

HIS MAJESTY himself dropped the curtain on the earth-play of the spirit-girl.

"The only real value of a story is its effect upon yourself," he said. "I must have an interval in which to judge the worth of yours."

At the time Dolores felt relieved, although he had not confused her with the interruptions and insistence of the previous séance. Satan had allowed her to tell her story in her own way, swiftly and simply, and had showed a positive gravity of attention over the ecclesiastical incidents.

Not until the next night came and went without the call for a third instalment, did she suspect that he had been merely bored.

When a second night passed with the same significant omission, and, after that, a third, fear possessed her.

Had she, then, fallen short of his expectations? Had she done what he had warned her not to do—had she failed?

Dolores took to staying in her chamber, hoping for his summons more than previously she had dreaded it. Over her babe she would hover the hours away, brooding rather than rejoicing at each cooed assurance that the infant-shade was content. Would the price of the respite be paid in part by the blameless soul of her soul?

To her here, through the guarded gossip of the proud Adeline, came reports of a direful activity on the part of the King. Never had he been more exacting, more merciless in his reversal of punishment for reward. His disposition of that first evening, during which she had waited in vain, seemed to have been directly inspired by her reminiscences of the parson person. In an open-air camp-meeting, "His Damnity" had preached the first of seven announced "sermons" to a vast concourse. Seven, it seemed, was the perfect number—a royal superstition. Hadn't she counted his seven courtiers, the seven windows of the throne-room, seven courses at dinner, seven days in his week?

Adeline admitted herself to have been a unit of the congregation of fiends. The first sermon had been, to say the least, impressive. Satan's text had been orthodox: "*A star fell from Heaven unto the earth; and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.*" He had attacked the letter of The Law. To be saved by "believing"—how vain a promise when to that Star of Heaven was given the key to the pit into which all eventually would be hurled who had been born heirs to sin!

Over Omnipotent Egotism he had ranted himself into a rage which had made his audience tremble. Fire flashed from his nostrils, his eyes, his finger-tips, as he compared his own indefatigable assertiveness with the retirement into the Light of the Great-I-Am. How dare He sit back, smug over His one noteworthy achievement—the Creation?

The Law of Redemption, pah! What were laws that were not enforced—mere vague threats of a future state? He asked consideration of the handling of his own first law as keeper of the pit key. Did he ever delay collection of the wages of sin? Angel worship was forbidden, and he didn't expect them to worship him. But they could fear him, and, fearing, must serve him. He advised them to hitch their hope-wagons to that fallen star—"their archangel in eclipse and the excess of glory obscured."

Truly this departure in infernal propaganda must have been fearsome. Also fearsome was Dolores' wonder over why she alone had not been bidden to attend. Adeline was inclined to attribute the omission to stage fright. M'lord, remembering the standard to which his entertainer had been educated, feared to fall short. Having successfully tried out his "delivery," however, he probably would ask her to the second sermon of the seven.

But what of the two intervening nights? Why this surcease of interest in the griefs which had so diverted him?

Dolores was forced to the conclusion that she had ceased to entertain. Perhaps, even then, the evil eye was sighting her fate—and the fate of her babe.

Desperation shook her from the stupor of waiting. Satan had preached action in his sermon, according to report. She must *do* something to re-arouse his curiosity. In the late

afternoon, as she knew, he often strolled in his favourite garden of Bad Luck. She dared not ask for an appointment; no. Yet why not "happen" to meet him?

In selecting the rays in which to dress, she remembered his preference for purples and scarlets, rather than the more delicate half-lights in which she would have clothed herself. But even while thanking Adeline for a grudging compliment over the blend of her robe with the purplish shadows of her eyes, she realized the depths to which she was sinking. For the first time she understood those women of earth who adorned themselves to enslave men whom they had come to hate. Those they feared most, they must charm. Poor, *poor* women of Earth!

In the lower reaches of the garden she came upon an illustration of her thought—a fountain effect whose central figure was the sculped, naked body of a woman bent beneath the club of her man and master, on her lips a seductive smile, from her eyes spouting twin founts of electric spray—tears of terror.

Hearing footsteps behind, Dolores stopped, as if in admiration of the ghoulish conceit. The throb of her temples was not cooled by the hot winds with which the tropical foliage illusions of the garden were artificially fanned. The sinking sensation at her heart was no sickness from the too-intense odours of the lavish-looking bloom. The hurt of her ears could not be blamed on shrieks of the peacocks, parrakeets and tanagers which soundlessly strutted and winged about. No winds of Gehenna might discomfort her, except in her own acknowledgment. No odours, except from memory, might penetrate her senses from poinsettias or rhododendrons. No sound, except as she imagined it, might swell the throats of the birds. From the rubber plants grouped at the entrance gate, through the lane of Spanish bayonets whose barbs were a menace to one who strolled, to the fountain called "Fate of the Fair," the garden was one vast stage set, a master chimera. Bad luck, then—that too must be an hallucination.

Courage came to Dolores with the thought. She, an immortal woman-soul, would not bow the neck to an undeserved club. She must lift her head, believing that even the winds of Hell would cool her brow; must delight in fragrances,

strong from her own expectation ; must open wide her ears to the Seraphs' song of hope.

Ready to meet His Majesty, she turned. Her disappointment was as keen as her courage, to see in him who was approaching the lame old soldier-soul, Samuel Cummings. At first only his face and crutch were recognizable, so resplendent was he in the uniform of an officer of the Hadean Hordes. When he drew up before her with his old-time salute, she counted on his forehead, branded blood-red, the stars of a general.

Her maid had told him that he would find her out here, the old chap explained. He had come to tell her the news. His Majesty had called him to an interview night before last, and had promoted him because it was beneath the Royal dignity to confer in private with a corporal.

So Old Sam, then, had supplanted her as entertainer.

As if in answer to Dolores' thought, he motioned with his crutch toward a bench of opalesque stone that stood beneath an arbour of purple bougainvillae. The honour paid him, he declared, was only the preface to his news. When seated beside her, however, he seemed loath to proceed, glancing uneasily among the flowers of an oleander bush which changed colour with alternating currents of red and white.

His "news," he at last confessed in guarded tones, concerned herself. Dangerous though a report might be, he felt one his duty. His summons into The Presence had been to discuss her. His Highness had reintroduced the subject of "Grief to Men" and had asked the veteran's opinion on a number of her points. Did Sam think her the most beautiful woman he ever had seen ? Did he consider her deep or just dumb ? In what, according to a recent earthling, lay her chief charm ?

On the whole, declared the old new general, Satan had acted a good deal as would some human swain who was getting interested in a girl. With men, he wasn't such a bad sort as Sam had expected. But with women—there never was any telling what—she—she understood ?

At his embarrassed glance, she nodded. What woman had better reason to understand than she ?

"One question he asked was why you never smiled," the simple soul continued solemnly. "That stumped me. As I told him, Mary Gertrude used to be one laugh from morn till eve. 'Odd,' said he, 'when she's caused all those griefs.'"

"I never learned to smile," explained Dolores. "My father never did. He used to laugh sometimes. It was terrible to hear him. But he never smiled."

The wag of Old Sam's head was rueful. "I don't want to worry you, but I feel I should tell you what he called you—his 'latest flame in the land of such.' And he asked me if I thought that a woman who had ruined so many humans could be of any use to an immortal—some real bad one, say, who had a good thing to offer her. I reminded him of the Littlest Devil. 'Oh, the B. B.,' says he. 'Likely she did make one of them happy for a while. That isn't what I mean. My thoughts of her are pure—pure as Hell.' Ma'am, I can't figure it out any other way than that he's got a weakness for you."

"Please—*please* don't say that!"

Dolores shuddered as though shaken by the torrid breeze, then withdrew from his side to the outmost end of the bench. Some unseen force had moved her. Grateful though she felt for his effort to forearm her, she found herself unable to reassure him. A hateful reluctance stayed her tongue.

Came startling interpolation: "*All has been overheard.*"

The words were spoken in a voice which both recognized. There materialized to their vision the superb face and figure of His Satanic Majesty. He was seated between them.

"Eavesdropping is old stuff, I know," he remarked easily, "but it never ceases to be useful."

"It was you who forced me aside?" Dolores struggled with her indignation. "I didn't know you could make yourself invisible."

"Surest thing you *didn't* know, then. Turning oneself on or off is a trick that our late angel did not lose in his fall. Fancy one of the Cherubim reduced to turning himself off and on in lowlands like Gehenna!" With angry intolerance, he faced toward General Sam. "What's this you were saying about me? A weakness—*I?*"

"A man's weakness for his woman is his strength," the soldier-soul contended.

"Your tongue tangles when you measure my strength by that of men. I am"—Satan's glance slashed out like a sword—"I am the Destroyer. Fool, fear me!" Irritably he added: "Who do you think you are—Prometheus unbound? Why do you suppose I promoted you if not to get rid of you without breaking my pact with Dame Dolores? Get yourself to the nearest army camp, and make believe you've earned your commission. See you stay there, too, until I send for you."

"But what about my appointment in the palace? Who will hold the bowl for Your Highness' tears?"

The King arose as though further enraged by the reminder, then succumbed to a sort of paroxysm so violent that his utterance was impeded.

"Tears—and over Dolores' griefs to men? Now I know that you are a fool. To have taken me seriously when I called myself a crocodile! I to weep—and over human nature? Excuse me, folk. Let me enjoy myself while I'm young! Honestly, I near injure my sides every time I think of what she put over on that high-priest of the Great-I-Am!"

Too preoccupied was he to return his new-made general's salute. Not until the sound of Old Sam's peg-leg had ceased to punctuate the pause did he reseat himself upon the bench.

"As for you, designing jade——"

In the very midst of his address, he became lost in contemplation of the royal toes. The girl-shade beside him realized that not once to-day had he looked directly at her. She was reminded painfully of an earthling who had been strong towards all his world, yet weak toward her. He must not have that sort of weakness for her—Satan. He *must* look at her. She leaned toward him and tried to smile. But he would not meet her eyes. Hideous it was that he should ape the mannerism toward her of that one she had cared for most on earth.

Long it seemed before he completed his remark.

He had her at last, he declared; had preferred not to see or hear her again until he had her. Now he was ready to take up with her the matter of her status in Shadow Land. Had she

wondered why she was the only soul about the court not more or less tormented? The answer was easy. Torment wasted power. He chuckled; then, on noting that he chuckled alone, frowned. Had she no sense of humour?

At her ingenuous acknowledgment of her lack in that respect, the Satanic brow cleared. To know that she had not humour was humour in itself. Positively the most comical thing about the story of her life was that she could be so serious over it now that she was dead. Henceforth he should not expect anything in her but soul. He had a beautiful soul himself. But he didn't let it interfere with his daily pleasures.

At first he had attributed his interest in her to the correlative facts that she was a fallen woman and he a fallen angel. When, later, he had come to realize her desirability to devils in general, he had searched for a more comprehensive reason.

To his way of looking, she was pleasant to the eye. But beauty was a matter of taste. To a Zulu she wouldn't compare with his thick-lipped, black-hued mate. The Cabots' housekeeper, Mrs. Morrison, might be right in accrediting her with a sweet disposition. Yet weren't unattractive girls usually called "sweet," and "good-natured"? She appeared to be unselfish—where was there an attribute so tiresome in women as unselfishness? The fact that she boasted no brilliancy was a point in her favour. The suggestion of an ardent nature in those dear little wrinkles around her mouth might be either pro or con.

In what, then, lay her lure?

He had felt that he should lose respect for his own intelligence if obliged to listen to the end of her story before he knew. He had found the clue in the least important of her conquests—in him she called the "city's choice." Why had that young Irishman's blood gushed to his face at the cling of her hand upon his arm, only to recede at the look of eyes so like those of his year-old babe? Why had he calmed into a fine protectorate from one of those sudden physical excitements peculiar to mortal men?

He had got her, had got her at last. And with her he had got the secret of her power—a secret of inestimable value to herself. Oh, she need not look so helpless and perturbed!

She need not maintain that pose with him, now that he understood.

"Exactly what is it in me"—the dark head drooped—"that you understand?"

He slashed out at an oleander until it blazed at him its bi-coloured fire.

"You were red and white—a human flower more attractively charged than any in my garden of Bad Luck." He rose to bow before her, low and with no trace of irony. "You were an effect unique among womankind, a combination of unconscious lust and seductive innocence. You appealed with equal force to the bad and to the good in that creature as near devil as angel—everyman. *I* know. Am I not the limit in both?"

From gay to grave his manner again changed when he squared around and at last faced her.

"Never have I destroyed any force that works for me," he stated. "You have powers for evil which, if developed, might rival my own. It remains with you whether that power increases in you, or, through duress, is destroyed. Come, what do you say?"

"What can I say, when I don't know——"

"Allow me to say it for you, then. As I have explained in part, I need—and need in a hurry—more men souls than I have been able to draft since the conception of my Great Intention. Although I've never been above taking any outside help I can get, I have always despised the retro-action upon men of women. Since Eve, the fair have been a sickly lot, more given to good influences than bad. Even the experts developed by modern sex and social problems have shown chiefly stupidity. Not the worst of them but have ideas of *bona-fide* reform back of the rows they're raising. As for the vampires, real ones always have been rare. That Catherine Cabot, to whom you've called my attention, is exceptional."

"Yes, Dr. Shayle used to say that Catherine could not be 'reached.'"

"Shayle—is that the name of the ruined healer on your passport?"

"Oh, the world was mistaken about him, Your Majesty. Dear Clarke Shayle—he said that I saved him."

"Let us hope not, you slave to tradition!" His Highness snapped. "If you knew the deplorable failure I've made trying to get bad results from women, you'd agree that I'd best stick to my last—and first—the men. However, since you've been séancing with me, certain possibilities of making your sex serve my purposes have opened up before me. In the past my idea has been that the more I could keep women under, the worse the world would be. You have changed my slogan to 'Turn 'em loose.'"

"*I?*"

For a moment Satan enjoyed the admixture of humbleness and indignation in her query.

"Nice work," he commented. "Such feminism may be made the most dynamic evil in the universe by one who masters it. De Maupassant thought he had, but his ideas of women were limited to types of his time. I have the one mind that can look at your sex unbiased by sentiment. As I had no mother, all women are before, none behind me. The male may go on and on indefinitely with sex villainies. But the female is likely to learn, from one indecency, her Swan Song, as it were. Yet her lamentable limitations need not discourage us, since wars have made the fair population exceed—shall I say, the foul? 'By their works ye shall know them.' Your works I know. Ergo, I know you. Unlike your friend of the employment agency, I fit the position to the applicant. Here is the job I had created for you."

He would make her manager, accountable only to himself, of the woman's department of the mortal world; he would teach her the psychology of spiritual communication, so that she might personally direct important cases, as did he in his own field; he would place under her charge a school of female fiends whom she might entrust with missions on earth as soon as she deemed them sufficiently proficient in her subtleties, even as he did his demon sleuths.

To appeal, to obtain, to destroy—was not that the mission of her sex? Yet so long had women been burden-bearers,

deprived of initiative by the master's rein and hobbled by the ultimate of man-made laws, that even he who so sorely needed them, had failed to appreciate their suppressed power. Never would they come into their own until they learned that their capability lay, not in trying to be what they were not, but in being essentially and ruthlessly what they were.

"Ah, wrigglier than a she-cobra's wriggle is the female of my dreams!" Glowing from that ruddy mist of concentration which once before Dolores had seen, His Highness warmed to his thought. "If all the anarchists in my incubators were matured, they'd be a puny menace to society and the State as compared with women let loose. Take the punitive laws from any class and what is the result? Riot, bestiality, sin. Fear is what has held women down. Take away fear and what will they do? They'll master the men. Once give 'em licence, and they'll soon make up for their enforced virtue of the past! The fact that they do not originate is their best-worst trait—saves a lot of energy. Why, when I contemplate their daring, their imperviousness to pain, their concentration through heredity upon the meaner issues; when I allow myself to imagine the deafening pop of the bottled-up indignities poured upon them in the past—*Whew!* I, the First and Last, shudder in humility over my virtues. This I give you as a prophecy: To the female of the species is the victory of vice."

Dolores was lifted above fear for herself by fear for womankind.

"For shame!" she cried.

"Shame? What is that?"

"What I feel for you, Your—Your Lowness."

"Good! I *must* be getting bad! It is well that you pay me an out-loud compliment now and then, when I'm paying you with the utmost of my unlimited power. You encourage me to proceed. Although I don't wish you to doff your gentle ways—they'll serve as a model for your she-destroyers—you must keep clearly in mind that our chief emotion down here is hate—immortal hate."

"Hate immortal? I find it hard to think of such a thing. I am sure that I could never hate for long. On Earth, I

might stay angry with some one through the day, but I couldn't go to sleep until I forgave."

His Majesty scowled down at her, evidently disturbed. "It's all right to look at, that idea. Of course you don't feel it. You certainly must hate these earthlings you're telling us about."

"You are wrong, I don't hate them. Somehow I can't hate any of them." With a catch of breath, she added: "If you said immortal love, now——"

"Tut, tut, my child. Isn't it hot enough down here? Don't heat up my imagination."

"But didn't you ever feel love for anybody?"

"No, nor wouldn't if I could. Love is weakening—orangeade for temperance fools like General Sam. What is it anyhow? Some old scientist has defined it as 'merely the attraction of billions of atoms, electrically charged in the system, corresponding to the same number of the same sort of atoms in a person of the opposite sex.' There you have it. What is there so marvellous about that—what to make such a to-do over?"

"That definition doesn't sound right to me."

Dolores' eyes gazed out over the garden with a waiting look. It was as if, within their shadows of a purple that shamed the bougainvillae bloom, hope was hiding in the arbour.

The King watched her in his considering way, his arm stretched along the back of the bench. When convinced that she had forgotten his presence, he suddenly snapped his strong, long fingers around the nape of her neck.

With a smothered scream, Dolores tried to shake off his clutch. Never from a mortal man had she felt a touch so offensive, yet so loathsomely attracting.

"Please release me. You are so—so intense!"

"Quite too intense"—Satan drew back his lips over his teeth in a bestial smile—"and in the imperative tense. Remember, Dame Dolores, that what I want, I do not ask. I take."

Sliding his hand down her arm, he drew her to her feet.

"Considering that, how do you like the prospect of this High Priestess job?"

"I simply couldn't do such things as you propose," she dared his displeasure to protest. "I should fail dismally, for I am not at heart the sort you think. You say that love weakens one, but my spirit would die, I know, if I cast love out and tried to hate. You would be disappointed in me and your plans would be in vain. If success is what you demand, choose some one stronger in hate than I—some one who——"

"Playing in form to the last!" he commented. "You are wise. There really is no comparison between this appointment and one to the Wantons' Well, or, say, the Traitors to Mothers. You, by the way, are a native daughter to the last-named state. Did that strike you the other day? According to your own account, you killed your mother before the poor thing could so much as say 'top o' the morning.'"

"At least let me think it over. Let me finish the séances first," Dolores pleaded, under the iron of his reminder. "I am exhausted each night when they are over, and busy all the next day planning how best I may continue to entertain Your Lowness. A new undertaking might make me a failure in both."

"There is something in that, unless——" He peered down at her suspiciously. "You're not aspiring to outwit me by dragging out that life story indefinitely? The new job *will* tax your concentration, no doubt of it. And you do look all in after your regular evening stunt. All right. You may have one week after the end of the séances in which to make up such of your mind as I have not made up for you. But I say——"

"Yes, Your—yes, Pluto?"

"Aren't you the dearest of griefs?" Although he laughed at the guile with which she had thanked him for his concession, he finished the warning sternly. "See that you make your story snappy to-night. Don't let these days of grace—or disgrace—make you as profuse of unessential details as you've been chary of the essentials on past nights. If you do,

you'll find yourself talking against time with a vengeance. A vengeance—get that?"

Yes, she assured him, her voice a minor chord. She would try to make it "snappy."

A weakness for her? As compared with the strength he was showing to bend or break her to his will, that dread now seemed a hope.

CHAPTER XI

IN the long moment during which Mrs. Cabot levelled her astonished stare upon the applicant as governess to her son, the girl did not breathe. When direct demand was made of her she could not speak.

"Tell me, is coming here your own idea? Or did my husband——?"

The smart vision in black and white interrupted herself by an over-shoulder invitation.

"Come in, Henri. Be moved to admiration of my John. Even you will concede that he is improving."

To the personage in blue-grey uniform who clattered at her side, she added:

"You have the privilege of viewing at close range the famed Dolores Trent."

"Ah, the mademoiselle which Meestaire Cabot have rescue?" inquired the French cavalry officer.

"The same. Is there anything like rescuing a lady, my dear d'Elie, to excite a man's interest in her? He is pleased with her because pleased with himself—so pleased that he wants to keep right on rescuing her. I might have known that John would locate the disappearing heroine of his hero act sooner or later. But how naïvely American to try to make a convenience of his own home!"

In Dolores' silence, Mrs. Morrison denied the charge.

"Miss Trent was sent here through Madame Sheehan's agency, to which I frequently apply. Up to the moment when you came in just now, Mrs. Cabot, she thought me the mother of the child in need of a governess. I assure you

that Mr. Cabot had nothing to do with her application."

An arpeggio of light laughter, accompanied by a bass chord, greeted this defence.

"No use talking, she's *good*, isn't she?" Mrs. Cabot asked her escort, before turning directly to Dolores. "But I fear, Miss Trent, that you're not quite good enough. A mother owes something to her child, even though a father thinks that he does not. I thank you for coming. You have succeeded better than our parson-friend's lynx in giving me a rare sensation—that of surprise. I wish you a very good morning."

Dolores rose, and heard a quiet voice making her reply.

"I am sorry that I came. I shouldn't have done so had I understood. I hope you will believe Mrs. Morrison, if not me, for Mr. Cabot's sake. Good morning."

On her way to the entrance, the purport of a rapid exchange in French between him named as d'Elie and Mrs. Cabot was forced upon her realization.

"Pardon, adored one, but have you considered the other needs of your household?"

"What other needs could there be in which this celebrated miss is concerned?"

"Only yesterday madame was saying that her husband seemed afflicted with ennui—that it might be advisable to stimulate his interest in life. Might it not prove pleasant, my angel, if the father of the infant terrible should find the new governess—shall I say, *congenial*?"

"Enough, my clever Henri. I understand."

So complete was the change of manner with which Mrs. Cabot stopped the girl at the door that a more experienced person could scarcely have been blamed for bewilderment. Her cynical expression was lost in a humid smile. Her voice softened. She tossed aside the crop with which she had been swishing the air to extend the hand of appeal.

"The Marquis d'Elie has criticized my lack of charity," she said. "Perhaps I *am* wrong to jump at conclusions. And it *is* a responsibility to send a mere child like you back into a world which already has been rather hard on her. Then, too, my unfortunate offspring is to be considered. It

is quite possible that he might get along better with a young person than the nursery monitors he so often has defeated. I wonder if you are as amiable as you look—if you could forgive the hasty things I said just now ? "

Dolores did not know what to think, still less what to say. She parried by a question which interested her.

" You call your son unfortunate. What is the matter with him ? "

Catherine Cabot's first talent was that of taking. Whatever she wanted in life she took as her perquisite. Always had she taken admiration, service, flattery, love, sacrifice, money. Literally she had taken her husband because he was useful to her. She proceeded now to take Dolores Trent.

" Oh, my dear, if you could know how unfortunate ! Most children have some sort of a chance, but not my poor Jackie. Probably after you have seen him, and know something of the disposition that comes from his sufferings, you won't wish to undertake him. You would need a love for children great enough to include the most unlovable."

" But I have a great love for children," Dolores said. " My neighbours used to say that I have a way with them."

" Mr. Cabot would be relieved of his heaviest burden if we could find some one who could handle Jack." Catherine continued her " taking." " It would seem like a fatality, wouldn't it, if in return for his small service to you that day at Seff's——"

" His service was not small, Mrs. Cabot. I may have seemed ungrateful not to thank him, but I—— You see——"

" Of course you couldn't, and of course he didn't wish you to," the wife assured her. " But it would be really beautiful —sort of nice and Emersonian—if you could pass along the favour he did you to his child. Suppose you hold an open mind, Miss Trent, until after you've met Jack. I'll come to his rooms later and help to explain him. Morrison will take up all details with you, if you should decide to stay. Won't you try, anyhow, to forget and forgive my unkindness ? "

The girl, still standing just within the door, heard the Frenchman's congratulation, as the brilliant-looking pair disappeared among the palms of the foyer.

" But you are wonderful, my adored one, most wonderful ! "

As Dolores stepped off the lift on to the third-floor landing that overlooked the great, glass-domed hall, a woman's scream cut the quiet. The housekeeper hurried ahead and threw open the door of a large, sun-flooded room.

" He have bite me, Mees Morrison. But see this mark on my wrist. I should regret to desert madame, but I give up my place rather than play as the nurse one hour longer."

The plaint arose from a be-capped young woman whom Dolores later learned to be Annette, Mrs. Cabot's maid, pressed into emergency service. She had made a shield of a light chair between herself and the boy of eight, or thereabouts, who was pursuing her. The bone of their contention seemed to be a particularly boneless toy dog held above his reach.

Dolores' first view of John Cabot, Jr., was not heartening. His only recognition of her presence was a scowl. In lurching forward over the chair, to recapture his plaything, he slipped and fell, with a shriek more of chagrin than pain, upon the floor. When Morrison and Annette rushed to his assistance, Dolores intervened. She asked them to leave her alone with the boy.

After the closing click of the door, she crossed to one of the windows ; seated herself in an upholstered chair, giving her attention to the view.

" Why don't you come and pick me up ? "

At the demand, she turned to see Master Jack, still sprawled on the floor, his chin cupped in his hands, his unchildlike frown upon her.

" I didn't suppose you'd wish to be picked up—a big boy like you ! " she said. " I didn't suppose you'd even wish me to look at you."

She regretted the ruse the moment she realized his physical handicap. Having challenged his pride, however, she hesitated to retreat. But an ache for him which never was entirely eased came into her heart as she watched his efforts to achieve his feet ; noted the warped condition of his legs ; watched his peculiar gait as he approached her—a

slithering forward of his feet, with no yield at his knees and hips.

Jack's upper body was only fairly developed, yet by comparison with his nether limbs his arms looked excessively long. His head, with its luxurious growth of dark brown, slightly curling hair, was large as a gnome's. At the moment his features were twisted into an expression of resentment. Only his eyes were beautiful, wide-set and Irish-grey in colour, with an outsweep of long, almost black lashes.

A certain embarrassment for him, which quickly followed the shock of noting his deformity, caused Dolores to lift her eyes toward a square object wrapped about with a bath towel, which was suspended from the ceiling near the window.

"A bird?" she asked irrelevantly.

"A canary." Master Jack now stood directly before her. "He sings so much around noon-time, that I bag him."

"Don't you like him to sing?"

"Of course not. He sounds too happy. Who are you, anyway?"

Dolores' eyes filled with the wistfulness that always overflowed her heart at the thought of her own lonely childhood—her super-sad little-girlhood.

"I am some one your mother has engaged to keep you company," she told him. "I do hope we can make a go of it, Jack. I certainly should appreciate your friendship."

"You're not——" Suspicion stiffened his face. "Say, if you're another governess——"

"I'd rather be," she interrupted, "a sort of a pal."

"But you couldn't play boys' games. What's your name?"

"Dolores Trent. Dolores means grief."

"'Lores—grief?"

His interest was caught, as had been Vincent Seff's, by that "sad little name" of hers. He hooked one hand to his hip, like some shrunken old man, and studied her from beneath the graceful sweep of his lashes. New objection occurred to him.

"My mother insists that I keep cheerful all the time. She mightn't let you stay if she knew that your name meant

grief. She hung Dick in here. That's one reason I don't like him."

"How you must love your mother, Jack—she's so beautiful!"

"That's no reason to love anybody," came his startling statement. "I've been living with my mother going on nine years now and she's getting kind of stale. I don't mind your name—being kept cheerful all the time is what I hate the most. I won't stand it, I tell you!"

Dolores quieted his returning excitement with a shrug of compliance. "Let's be miserable together, then."

"Until that gets tiresome." Even with the shrewd proviso, one corner of the boy's over-large mouth twitched, as if from humour. "Mind, I get my own way," he warned, "except when John's at home."

"John?" she asked.

"My father. He's the only person I respect, unless it is Clarke Shayle. I don't know, though. I think I like Clarke more than I respect him. Then, of course, he hurts me a lot. Clarke's my osteopath. He has won five medals for swimming. John hasn't any medals, but he doesn't need them. You sort of know that he could have all he wanted if he wanted them."

"And you let your father have his own way with you?"

"Of course, and not because he would punish me if I disobeyed him, either. They say"—Jack drew up quaintly—"that John worships me. As for me, I shouldn't wish to offend him. We're awfully chummy, my father and I, although he's very tall and strong and I——" Gulping, he turned away. "See that wooden cradle in the corner? I'd never have it in my rooms except that John was rocked in it when he was a baby. Seems funny to think of John ever having been a baby, he's so mannish now."

The Colonial antique which had distracted the little fellow's thoughts from himself, was the first of many interesting treasures he showed her. Mrs. Cabot had called the child's quarters "rooms," rather than "nursery," and they were, indeed, furnished incongruously for his years. Except for a few mechanical toys, the suite might have been that of

some sophisticated bachelor. The chamber that opened off the living-room was filled with heirloom mahogany, the bed a fine example of pineapple four-poster upon which not only his father's father, but also his great-grandfather had slept. Oil portraits of the paternal line hung on the walls. Turkish rugs lay upon the polished floors. An old corner clock ticked away the time for this last of the Cabots, as it had for seven generations of the name before him. He particularly liked the clock, Jack said, because it was calm-faced —not too sad, not too happy—just calm.

To a large bowl of gold-fish twinkling lazily in the sunlight, he invited her especial attention. They had been given to him by Clarke Shayle, he explained, to demonstrate the first principles of swimming.

"Clarke's going to make a swimmer of me," he asserted, "after he gets me well. Oh, you needn't look so sorry for me! I've got good arms, haven't I? You watch the gold-fish. They haven't any legs."

"Promise"—Dolores swallowed at the lump in her throat —"to give me one of your medals as a souvenir some day?"

From a downward glance at his poor body, he stared at her suspiciously. Evidently deciding that she was not making sport of him, he conceded: "Of course it may be a while yet. And we mayn't be friends that long. That's Clarke coming now for my treatment. I know his step."

"Dr." Shayle lacked the professional look. Although slightly above medium height, he was heavy as he well could be without loss of the athletic appearance for which Dolores had been prepared. He was young, clean-shaved, red-headed, freckled. Next after his appearance of strength, she noticed his cheerfulness. He had very white teeth and an engaging smile. Early in their interview, he laughed in a joyous, lingering way, with a glance that coaxed her to share his amusement. She noticed also in these first moments a yellowish fleck in the brown iris of his right eye. It served to give him an oddly intent expression.

At once after Jack's staid ceremony of introduction, the boy declared excitedly that he would not be "mauled" to-day—that he could not be forced into a treatment.

"Who wants to force you?" asked Shayle. "Do you think I enjoy wearing myself all out? A hike will be better for you, anyhow, at the present moment. Here, let me wind up that dog!"

His suggestion developed into a lesson in the slithering walk which evidently was the afflicted lad's chief hope of getting along through life. The toy, over whose possession Jack had bitten the French maid's wrist, was a mechanical dog whose four legs worked, when set going, with something like the movement which the osteopath was cultivating in his patient. The dog set the pace across the room; the boy did his best to follow.

"If you'd hold your head straight, little chump, and not so far to one side, you'd be better balanced," Shayle advised from his down-leaning, critical inspection.

"I won't and I never will." Jack stopped to glare back at his trainer. "John always holds his head to one side and I guess he walks all right."

"Oh well, if John does! Like father like son—beautiful sentiment." At once the doctor passed the point. Giving up seemed to be his policy. "That's enough hiking for to-day, old scout. Just let me feel those knee muscles. No, not a regular boy-handling on the bed. Just a touch to see if they are working better to-day."

During the operation into which Shayle had inveigled his patient, Dolores observed that his hands, while freckled and rather thick, were drawn into slender fingers, rounded at the tips, with nails neatly manicured.

"You've cheated—you're hurting me like a real treatment!" shrieked Jack, and he beat his practitioner in the face until able to wriggle out of his grasp.

Dr. Shayle changed the subject as promptly as he gave up his attempt. "Have a heart, Mister Dempsey. Wait a minute—I want to say something. What's become of the Cabot courtesy? You haven't asked Miss Trent to take off her things."

"We were so busy getting acquainted!" Dolores, with a confidential glance at the boy, lifted her hands to her hat. "Allow me to make up for friend pugilist's oversight."

With that coaxing laugh of his, Shayle arose to help with the Duvetyn coat.

In the act, his hand touched the pulse at the side of her throat. With the contact, a strange sensation quivered through her, disturbing, yet somehow pleasant. Evidently he, too, had felt it. He looked straight into her eyes for a moment, his face suddenly serious.

"*Ah!*"

Oddly enough, that was all he said.

"Madame has a headache, Dr. Shayle. She wishes you to attend her as soon as you have finish' with the—with Master Jacques."

The interruption came from Annette, the maid who had been bitten, now serene of voice and immaculate in fresh cap and apron.

"What, another?"

Dolores heard the mutter which prefaced Shayle's more formal acknowledgment of the message. She was surprised at the headache and told the doctor so. Mrs. Cabot had looked quite well on returning from her ride.

Although he made no comment, she was struck by his expression, and the fact that it was reflected in the thin face of the boy—an expression hard to define, but certainly not sympathetic.

After a luncheon served for Jack and herself in his sitting-room, the boy retired to his nap and she was summoned to an interview with Mrs. Morrison. She was not asked whether she would or would not stay. The housekeeper seemed to have taken it for granted that she would. And, indeed, two realizations had settled the issue. Jack needed her and she needed him.

Dolores was shown a pleasant room farther along the third-floor landing and asked about her luggage. Her wages would be the same as paid to the previous governess. Mrs. Cabot regretted a slight indisposition, but sent word that, as Dr. Shayle approved her start with Master Jack, she was to use her own judgment.

The kindly housekeeper expressed a personal hope that she would be happy and comfortable. She must come down

to the ground-floor parlour when lonely, and must not fail to ask for anything she needed or wished.

Before the young heir awakened, Dolores had returned to the outer room of the suite. She took up a magazine, but did not feel like reading—she got no farther than a page of kennel advertisements. Her eyes upon a circle which had been pencilled around the picture of a pedigree Airedale, she gave herself up to her thoughts.

Strange though it was, her present situation seemed natural. That she should find herself in the home of the Cabots who, from among the great cityfull, had figured in both her previous engagements, impressed her as nothing short of fatalistic. Blindfolded, she had faced in their direction. Each of her stumbles had been a step toward the place made ready for her. She had been prepared to appreciate what they had to offer her; they what she could and would return. The third attempt to earn her livelihood surely would prove the charm. Could it be possible that only that morning she had set out, the end of her day a closed book? This afternoon the book lay wide, its lines clearly typed. Pleasant reading the future chapters looked, each day-page illumined with the joy of doing for some one less fortunate than herself.

Until he spoke, she did not know that Jack was staring at her from the bedroom doorway.

"You have a nicer nose than the last one. She left because I called her 'Needle-nose Nannie' to her face. She had the piercingest nose I ever saw. I never asked my other governesses, but will you come with me on my drive?"

Dolores was glad to go, the more so that he had suggested it. Already she longed that he should love her. There seemed safety in the love of a child.

In the open car from which he preferred to take his air when the weather was fine, as he told her with his manner of a bored little man of affairs, she could scarcely restrain the impulse to put her arm around him. Appreciating, however, his oldishness, she contented herself with finding his hand beneath the fur robe when a squirrel excited them by dashing across the road in peril of their tyres.

They did not drive for long. Sight of children running races on the green brought from the cripple a crisp order of "Home, Herrick!"

Dolores made no protest. She understood. But she held tight to the gloved fingers beneath the robe.

"I never take any chances of missing John," was the boy's manufactured explanation. "He comes up to see me first thing after he gets home."

Back in his suite, the tedium of his shut-in life soon showed in his returning irritability.

"I do get so tired of women, women—always women! I don't like them any more than they like me. Why can't they get me a man governess?" And after a scowling moment: "What games do you know?"

Dolores did not know any. "Games" had been considered the least necessary thing in her child life. Yet the moment was unpropitious for admitting the lack. Urgently she applied to her imagination. A smothered cheep from the towel-covered bird-cage brought inspiration.

"Did you ever try," she asked, "a game called 'Turn-about'?"

"No. How do you play it?"

"Another name for it is 'Fair-Play.' Turn-about is fair-play, you know. First one of us—you or I—has his way. Then, turn-about, the other has his."

"Sounds a queer game." He considered for a moment, as the possibilities of the idea opened before him. "You can do anything you like in your turn—all the naughty things you've wanted to do but didn't dare?"

"All of them—that is, all you still wish to do."

"All right. First go!" A crafty look lit the grey eyes. Turning, he shuffled across the room. "I'm going to do what your coming stopped me from doing—break this dog. I hate—*hate*—HATE it! It is just a stupid toy, but it goes faster than I can every time, and it never hurts at all."

Without a word of protest, Dolores watched him hammer the floor with the device which was at once his ambition and his despair; allowed him to wrench it to pieces, legs from body and head from neck.

"My turn now," she said. "I'm going to take the towel from around Dick's cage."

Sagacity was evidenced in the boy's instant retort. "Then I'll take my next turn putting it back again."

"That will bring the game to a standstill. I can repeat, remember, as often as you," Dolores warned him. Stepping down from the chair upon which she had stood to let sunlight in upon the canary, now ruffling its yellow plumage enjoyably, she seated herself and stayed his lifted hand. "I want to tell you something, Jackie dear. Happiness is the most attractive thing in the world and one of the hardest to find. Just because your bird knows the secret of how to have it, even though shut up in a smaller space than you, you are jealous. So long as you're jealous, you'll never be happy. I've never been very happy either, but I want to be, and I've heard that happiness begets happiness. Maybe if you and I would listen to Dick sing, we'd get the spirit of why he sings. Maybe after a while we could be happy, too. What do you say?"

"I say it's no fun being happy."

Although he jerked his hand away and spoke defiantly, Dolores thought she saw a gleam of interest in his eyes.

"Of course, you can try if you want to," he added. "I'll take my next turn spilling the gold-fish. There'll be plenty of time for Clarke to get me some more before I'm strong enough to learn to swim."

Heartsick, Dolores watched him stagger toward the bathroom with the heavy glass bowl. She realized that, in steadying himself inside, he was waiting for her to object. But she uttered no word of reproach as he dumped the gleaming inmates and their small sea upon the tiling. When she heard him chuckling over their squirms, she followed him.

"My turn!" She took the bowl from him, filled it with fresh water and replaced within it the emptied moss and stones. Upon her knees on the folded bath-rug, she invited his assistance in a way most matter-of-fact. "We must get them in quickly or they'll die. Careful how you scoop them up—their fins are very delicate. See how glad they are to be back in the water again, and how gracefully they swim!"

The boy was actually helping her when the opening of the hall door interrupted. He steadied himself to his feet, then slithered into the sitting-room. Still bent to her life-saving task, Dolores heard the exchange without, and saw, over-shoulder, the man-to-man hand-shake of father and son.

"Hello, John Cabot!"

"Jack Cabot, hello!"

"I broke my dog, but you know the reason, John. I'd not mind so much if a live one beat me. Aren't you ever going to get me a real dog?"

"Your apology is accepted, Jack. But how could I know you'd be good to a live dog if you had one? He would have to be considered as well as you. They tell me that you break all your toys. I'd hate to see the spirit of a good dog broken. How can I be sure——"

"But I tell you I *would* be good to him. Don't I keep my word to you, John? I'd never have spilled the fishes except that I had given in to 'Lores about Dick. Oh, you don't know about 'Lores yet!"

The boy it was who brought them again face to face. Dolores had re-entered the living-room. John Cabot stopped beside the centre table—stopped and looked across at her. Just what his look meant—superstition, disapproval, fear—she could not be sure. Her heart beat uncomfortably while she waited for him to speak.

"I was told downstairs that a new governess had come," he said, after what seemed a long time. "I didn't understand that it was you."

"And I didn't understand that the position was offered by you," she replied. "If you are displeased, Mr. Cabot, I will give up—Jack."

"But I won't give *her* up, John, even if she is a woman-governess. She knows games that I never heard about. If you'll just get me an Airedale now——"

The child's demands broke the strain of the moment. John Cabot offered his hand. The faint smile of his reassurance disappeared from his lips when he read on the tiling the continuation of Jack's story of the gold-fish. Dolores studied him. Although a shadow lowered over his eyes

at this evidence of the evil temper of his son, he gave her an impression of great kindness and great suppression. He looked like what he really was—which, she had noticed, most men do not.

"I am afraid, my boy, that I could not trust a live dog to you," he said.

He was restoring the last of the stranded aquatics to comfort within the bowl when a lilting laugh surprised the three. Mrs. Cabot, evidently recovered from her headache, was watching them.

CHAPTER XII

JOHN CABOT seldom spoke with the new governess, as she took to absenting herself during the afternoon hour which he spent with his son. None the less she learned much about him, and, through the opinion of others, came to hold him in high regard.

Mrs. Morrison, daughter of the distinguished-looking old butler, Bradish, had been with the Cabot family practically all her lifetime, and proved an enthusiastic informant at the tea-time chats to which she frequently invited the girl. She took a personal pride in her employer and his career.

Mr. Cabot, she boasted, was one of the few "real" New Yorkers. His family had lived in Manhattan since the sixteen-fifties. A red-brick house in Whitehall Street, near the Battery, had been the birthplace of two generations of his grandfathers. There the Cabots had lived in the days when Castle Garden was the home of Grand Opera and Jennie Lind its Galli-Curci. The old house still stood, although its quondam drawing-room, where once the fair and gallant had stepped the minuet, now staged nothing more romantic than haggles over the price of shipping stores.

The comfortable fortune awaiting the present head of the house on his graduation from Princeton, he had increased to great wealth through an international banking organization, built up largely through his efforts. Particularly proud was the housekeeper over the fact that not only the Cabot dollars

but the master himself had worked unceasingly to "win the war," that not only his own Government, but also those of Britain and France had heaped honours upon him. In the underwriting of the war loans of the Allies, and in the direction of American Liberty Bond flotations, the services he had rendered without financial gain were declared inestimable. For a time, indeed, the Cabot Bank—a classic structure on Broad Street within a stone's throw of the homestead—had been the acknowledged centre of war finance for half the world.

By his employees—also according to Morrison—the banker was adored for his democratic manner; was respected for the unfailing honesty of his business code; was, at the same time, served with the diligence of fear. In his home, his every gesture was anticipated that it might be the more quickly obeyed. None, not even the beautiful madame, would have dared question any of the direct wishes he so seldom expressed.

To his only son, John Cabot was a fascinating mystery. "You know, John's a queer man," the boy confided to Dolores, with his elderly faculty for analysis. "He's as quiet and kind as anybody could be, yet he keeps every one scared of him. Morrison says it's because he is 'just.' What is there about justice, 'Lores, that everybody's so scared of?"

On another occasion: "One thing I like about John, is the interest he can take in little things. Why, he plays my Christmas games better than I do—and the way he can keep clocks going! Sometimes when he stays at home evenings, he brings almost a dozen in here and sits on the floor and gets them all ticking at once. That clock of my great-grandfather Cabot's is his pet. All the jewellers said the old works would have to be replaced. But John says he's going to keep it going through my lifetime at least. He's funny that way. He never thinks of dying. Somehow, I don't think anybody could make him die until he got ready."

Once the child-man had opened up a hurt in his confidence: "I heard my mother tell John one day that my grandmother—his own mother, you know—might have called

him ' Jack,' but she felt sure that nobody else had. She said that he was the uncompromising kind of man that everybody just naturally called ' John.' Sometimes my mother talks as if she did not think much of John, any more than she does of me. That's why I can't think much of her. Just what kind is an uncompromising man, 'Lores ? "

Even by madame herself were the peculiarities of the master of the great house discussed with the latest comer. Dolores, yielding to the unexpected fancy which Catherine seemed to have taken to her, and looking on her with almost worshipful eyes in her sacred capacity of motherhood, welcomed every opportunity of showing her gratitude. One stormy afternoon, when she had been summoned to m'lady's quarters on the second floor, the trend of the wife's conversation became an urge that the governess should think well of her husband.

Fragrant from her bath, Catherine was sitting before a pier-glass in her dressing-room, leisurely and, it would seem regretfully, covering her exquisite body with undergarments of rather filmy texture. The fresh-opened box of bon-bons which stood on a near-by tabourette she urged upon Dolores with her comments.

" John Cabot's character is an open book—*in cipher*," she declared. " I have noticed, my dear, that you appear to be just a bit in awe of him. It seems too bad, when you will be thrown so much together over Jack. Perhaps if I give you the key to him you will feel more comfortable in his presence. He is not nearly so cold or stern as he acts. Really, he used to be quite ardent before—well, you know, before we got to know each other so thoroughly. I used to think him the strongest man I'd ever met."

Dolores resented the insinuation. " But isn't he still stronger, now that he has learned to control his feelings ? Perhaps he wouldn't wish other people to be given what you call the key to him."

But Catherine was not listening, as told by the opera air she hummed. She had become intent over an open drawerful of lingerie, some pieces simple, some elaborate as the sweat-shop set bought that day at Seff's. With the selection of a rather

plain Philippine linen for that day's wear, her interest returned to the ever-engrossing subject of herself.

" Queer, isn't it, how one's early habits will cling ? Have you heard that I wasn't always rich ? I haven't a dollar except what Mr. Cabot has settled on me. My father had plenty to start with, but he squandered it all on ' old masters ' —that turned out to be neither masters nor old. I try to forget the humiliations of those days, but every now and then I am reminded by little things—like, for instance, this."

At the puzzled look with which Dolores' eyes met the emergence of her own from the neck scallops of the frock, she expanded :

" I never wear my best clothes on a stormy day. Isn't that too funny, when I don't need to think of the weather ? I'm interested in noting my own characteristics quite as much as I would be those of another person. Dr. Shayle says that I have the introspective faculty to a marked degree. I appreciate the compliment from him."

" He seems to see," the girl remarked, " so much more than is on the surface."

By way of the glass, Catherine smiled at her, the short upper lip which was a piquant flaw in otherwise perfect features lifting over her gleaming, mouselike teeth.

" Oh, Dr. Shayle has remarkable powers ! I discovered him, you know. No wonder he admires me and feels—well——"

For once Dolores interrupted. She did not wish to be told first-hand of the likable young osteopath's devotion, concerning which she had heard considerable gossip from the servants. She felt that it would not be loyal to Dr. Shayle. Although fearful for her temerity, she changed the subject.

" That day you engaged me, the Marquis d'Elie spoke of other needs of your household in which I might help. You have been very kind to me, and I want to do all I can in return. Won't you tell me what they are—the other needs ? "

Relieved that her beautiful employer showed no resentment, she did not try to analyse the confused look turned into the mirror.

" The need the Marquis meant "—Catherine spoke readily

enough after the moment's pause—" is mine for some one congenial to talk with in this great barn of a house—some one refined, you know, with a mind more the quality of my own. That's all, really, just some one to lift the heavy moments. D'Elie feels a deep sympathy for me."

So pathetic did she sound and look that Dolores, too, felt sympathetic. That the enviable Mrs. Cabot might have a secret sorrow had not occurred to her. This time she did not check the tendency toward confidence; she waited rather in silence, lest she should seem inquisitive, for whatsoever might be entrusted to her. But before Catherine could continue, some one entered the boudoir that opened off the dressing-room. It was the Marquis d'Elie.

That was the early afternoon when he, like the oft-mentioned "angel" of the old saw, startled them both by an unannounced appearance. Dolores was sitting out of his line of vision, but she could see him plainly in the pier-glass. She rose, outraged at the Frenchman's presumption with the wife of John Cabot; she turned toward Catherine, waiting for her to reprimand him as he deserved.

Catherine, who had been in the act of tying a ribbon at her breast, stiffened as if turned to the marble she looked, and stared into the glass at the reflection of the smiling alien. A hurried glance she spared for the confections of silk, crêpe and lace in the open drawer, then bit her lip. When at last she spoke, her voice was one of utter exasperation.

"And me in a cotton chemise!"

"But lovely—ah—as a lily of *la belle France*!" the Marquis enthused. "I have slip' up for that small talk of confidence about the amount of the dot, *mon ange*. I feel distress that you must sue for so much. But the responsibility is on me to assure that my queen have those comfort to which——"

"You certainly slipped up!" Sharply Catherine cut into the expression of his "responsibility." Hers seemed to be for Dolores and the dressing-robe which she had worn from her bath. This she donned before going into the boudoir. "You shouldn't have come unannounced, Henri. Never do such a thing again. How fortunate it is that Miss Trent happened to be with me. You remember meeting Jack's new governess?"

The man's assurance was remarkable. Low he bowed before Dolores, when, in response to Catherine's appeal, she followed.

"And how is mademoiselle enabled to do with the fiend-*enfant*?" he inquired affably.

Dolores strove to control her contempt for him. She replied that she found Jack no fiend, but a most lovable child. He must be awakening from his nap about now. Would Mrs. Cabot excuse her?

"First, my dear, will you ring for Annette?" Catherine made proviso.

"And how," the Marquis persisted in the wait, "is the so-famed siren enabled to do with Meester Cabot?"

Grateful for the support of madame's frown, Dolores answered, steadily as she might: "So far Mr. Cabot has made no complaint of my methods with his son."

"She has done wonderfully—*with Jock.*" Catherine smiled at Dolores her innocent smile. "I, for one, am most grateful to Miss Trent, even if John hasn't shown his appreciation."

"Perhaps he has not—*as yet*—have the opportunity." The foreigner, too, contributed an encouraging beam.

"Just what I've been telling her!" Catherine approved. "Miss Trent is so very self-effacing that I fear John thinks——"

Just which of the wife's fancies was about to be attributed to the great brain of John Cabot, Dolores never knew. She felt a sudden and vehement disinclination to hear his possible thoughts discussed before such an audience. She crossed to the gallery door.

"I hear Annette coming. I—I'd like to go, Mrs. Cabot; Jack may be looking for me."

She did not wait for the lift, but hurried up the wide marble steps that led from landing to landing to the top of the house. Fast as she took them, however, distressing questions pursued her.

What was she to think—how conduct herself?

Looking into Jack's living-room, she saw that the door into his bedroom was still closed. The calm-faced clock announced that it was not really time for him to have awakened. As she

went towards her own chamber to wait, she heard the click of the lift letting some one off at the third landing, but she did not glance up to see who it was. She wished to be alone—to think.

Once her own door was closed, however, she shrank from thinking. Rather than force herself to any immediate conclusion regarding the surprising developments of the last several minutes, she allowed her mind to rest, as it were, upon the thought of young Jack.

During the days which had accumulated into weeks since her entry into the Cabot home, her influence upon the boy had continued to be poured into the mould of their first hour. The household agreed that none of the many who had undertaken him had approached her success. Rather than the problem which he was said to have been to earlier governesses, he had become a revelation to her.

Although they continued to play " Turn-about " at times, she had ceased to rely upon games for the establishment of understanding between them. So long as Jack did what he knew to be right and fair, he and she might share enjoyment, even happiness. When he ceased, her disappointment in him spoiled their day. They consulted upon every item of their daily programme, which was subject to change. From play to textbooks had been a gradual but sure transition. What at first had caused ruction, became a medium of pleasant companionship. Lessons learned under a " pal " instead of a taskmistress didn't seem like lessons at all.

Dolores' service was but what she would have given unrequited to the stunted human plant. Love had bloomed as her reward. The lad's devotion to her had become a byword in the house.

Only last evening, when she had slipped into his room to bid him good-night after the maid had left, he had overcome his prejudice against any show of affection sufficiently to lift his over-long arms about her neck.

" 'Lores," he had whispered half-ashamedly, " I have made up a nice name for you. I don't wish to tell even you what it is. I'm afraid you'd make fun of it. It is just a little name for you that I save to think about when I'm trying to go to sleep."

With the poignant memory, the girl felt comforted. Life, which hitherto had seemed indifferent when not actually cruel toward her, had grown kind. Surely no malice of Jade Fate could be behind the gift of a child's adoration.

And in what luxury did she live—she, whose sole capital so recently had been a ripening nectarine! No opportunity was given her to think of her needs. They were fore-attended. Beside her own beautiful room, the young heir's kingdom was shared with her. And more than her needs were remembered. Mrs. Cabot's gratitude and affection took the practical form of tickets to theatre and opera matinees, of the free use of Jack's car, and twice of invitations downstairs to dine *en famille*. In a partial expenditure of her salary, she had acquired, by way of being more worthy her surroundings, some unpretentious, but pretty clothes. The black worn for Trevor Trent she had laid away for the gayer colours liked by Jack, just as she was trying to lay away sorrow for good cheer.

To-day, where was that good cheer?

Here she had shut herself in her room in a panic of foreboding. Was she so used to trouble that she would attract by expecting it? Despite the general kindness towards her, she felt afraid.

There was Dr. Clarke Shayle. At first his show of interest in her had been confined to the period of Jack's daily treatment, when he would chat with the two of them in the set phrases to which he was given, leaving an impression of impartial friendliness. But a few days before, he had returned during the boy's nap hour to add a detail to his instructions. Even Jack had pierced the pretence and had taken occasion, through some instinct or reason over which he grew quite sullen, to acquaint his mother with the fact.

The annoyance shown by Mrs. Cabot brought memory back to the more recent annoyance of this early afternoon. What had given the Marquis d'Elie the right of way to madame's boudoir? She decided to force the question from her mind as beyond her scope. General hints about the impecunious foreigner had been emphasized by Annette, after the style of the French paper-backs which formed her ideas of high-life lived low. Vicariously the maid had thrilled over d'Elie's infatua-

tion for her beautiful mistress ; deplored the fact that m'lady, being, alas, already wedded, might not acquire the right to the proud title of Marquise of France ; grieved over the misfortune that her heroine, having no personal fortune, might not with financial safety free herself. Oh, not that madame had any more real feeling for her suitor than for her own husband! Her heart's love, as Annette had reason to know, was given to another. That complication, however, was according to form, as written in French novels.

All this was peace-poison, Dolores decided, and for such there was no antidote. One thing only must she remember. " M'lady " was John Cabot's wife. The fact stared from her dressing-table mirror each time, as now, she smoothed her hair and compared its blackness with Catherine's glory of fine silk and pale gold. Of it she was reminded each time her heart expanded over lonely Jack, or her eyes caught the gleam of the limp diamond-and-platinum circlet which was his mother's latest-acquired and must-admired " wedding " ring.

She herself had been judged unjustly by appearances. She must not—she would not judge. Married women, she had been told, outgrew the prudishness which mothers taught their daughters. Titled foreigners were said to be more careless of conventions than the great, clean men of America. Every melioration she must consider. Perhaps even the much-discussed pair's recent suggestions to her, at which she had felt such offence, had been conceived as they were worded, in kindness. Catherine was the wife of the king of the Cabots and the mother of Prince Jack. The queen-mother could do no wrong.

Her decision reached, Dolores realized an unwonted physical fatigue. She lay down on the bed for a moment that she might take a fresh face and mind to Jack. A glance at the ivory clock on her bedside table told her that it was fifteen minutes to three. She closed her eyes with the intention of allowing herself the quarter-hour. For several minutes she continued in full consciousness of the trustful thoughts upon which she had decided as a policy. Then soon, although daytime napping was not her habit, she fell into a doze.

Her eyes flashed open before she was fairly awake, as if at a

call. For a moment she gave herself up to an exquisite sensation which had come to her. She felt relaxed, flushed, very much at peace. In a sort of dream, some one with strong arms, who cared for her, had rocked her as she had often longed to rock Jack. Repeatedly a tender, infusing voice had said to her: "Rest, little girl . . . everything's all right. . . . Rest. . . . Rest!"

And she had rested. How long? A glance at the clock brought her to her feet. It was fifteen minutes after three!

Near the head of the stairway, beneath a boxed catalpa tree, stood a decorative carved stone seat. Upon it sat Dr. Clarke Shayle. As, with a nod, Dolores was about to hurry past him and into Jack's room, he caught her hand and drew her to a seat beside him.

"You can spare a moment for the human headache powder," he said. "Tell me, how did you like it?"

"*It?*" She stared at him.

"The powder. But never mind. You don't need to answer. You certainly look some better at the present moment than when you ran away from me into your room."

"You can't mean that—that you——"

The yellowish fleck in his eye twinkled, although his face was unusually serious as he glanced down at the watch which, oddly enough, lay face up in his palm.

"At eight minutes to three I volunteered a first-aid treatment. I coddled you mentally in the way I'd like to do really. You are an easy subject, you poor, scared little chump. But it's a hard life waiting on a stone bench. At fifteen after three I was selfish enough to give you the wake-up ring. Come, how *did* you like it?"

"I—I do feel refreshed. What is it about you—what is it?"

"I've wanted to explain that and a lot of things to you for days, but you never give me an opportunity. I want to explain myself to you before some one does it for me—to tell you to look out for me. I am what you might consider a 'dangerous' man. Oh, it's not inherited—it's a gift."

This rueful repetition of one of the several set phrases with which he punctuated his most serious utterances was accompanied by the quick, cheerful laugh which was his greatest

charm. Then the laugh's smile stiffened into an expression of utter misery.

So shocked was Dolores that she forgot her hurry.

He turned from the sight of her sympathy; forced himself to continue. "I am not an honest osteopath, Miss Trent. My success is founded on the fact that I am magnetic. You felt that the first day you met me. You remember? See how strangely I can make you feel with a touch."

"Yes, I remember. Oh, don't—please don't do that again!"

Even in freeing her wrist from the slim pulsant fingers which had clasped it, she realized that her sensations justified his boast. Fearing his touch, she liked it.

"Never mind, I won't. I don't want to attract you in that way. You can trust me. I won't touch you again—that is, not until you wish me to. Try to get what I'm telling you. It may kill me with you, but there's no other way than to make a clean breast of it. I've built up my practice on nothing more nor less than animal magnetism. Excite through the touch system. Give sensations instead of curing them. Lord help me, she doesn't see when I tell her how low I am!"

He paused as if in hope of help from her. But Dolores could not speak. She was trying to believe that she had misunderstood.

"Lately I find that I'm getting psychic control," he continued. "A nice little lot of harm I could do in the world if I wanted to." His voice was husky. In the moment before he dropped his face into his hands, his clean smile showed again. "But I don't want to. I hate this life. I hate my success. I hate being called in the profession 'The Ladies' Pet.' Did you know I was called 'The Ladies' Pet'?"

"I know," said Dolores, "that Mrs. Cabot thinks you are a remarkable man."

"*She* should. She made me what I am to-day, and to-morrow—handed me over to her social set. She's satisfied, if I'm not. She knows and I know that she can unmake me just as easily."

"Why should she unmake you? She seems to take a pride in you and in your admiration for her."

"My *what*?"

"Only this afternoon, Dr. Shayle, she was telling me what you had said about her powers of introspection and concentration."

"Her powers of—— You little chump!" He glanced toward the stairway; controlled his incipient laugh; and added guardedly: "She hasn't enough concentration to write a post-card."

"Then why do you flatter her so?"

"Ladies' pets are trained to meet the demands for flattery of their petters. Catherine has a certain surface shrewdness, yes, but you can't 'reach' her. Don't worry about her. Worry about me, Dolores. Tut, don't scold me! You wouldn't if you knew how long I've wanted to call you Dolores to your face. I am doing what is awfully hard for me, not to have you point out my weaknesses, but in the hope that you'll encourage me to——"

With a smothered imprecation, he stopped. From his slumped position he had seen that Mrs. Cabot was ascending the stairs. At the top of the climb she stopped and saw them. She was dressed in a negligee of yellow satin and lace and looked exceedingly angry.

"I thought I heard voices and wondered if this could be possible." Her upper lip whitened over the mouse teeth as she directly addressed Dr. Shayle. "Don't you know that I am waiting for my treatment?"

The colour of the young man's hair blended into his forehead and cheeks. He got to his feet.

"Miss Trent and I have had quite a talk." Although obviously nervous, he forced his coaxing smile. "We've discussed most of the important questions of the day. Not that we've got anything settled at the present moment; but we've exercised our minds and so have made progress, even if the world——"

"If *only* you wouldn't say 'at the present moment'!" Catherine snapped.

Without a second glance at the governess, but a peremptory gesture to her physician, she turned back to the stairs.

Shayle, his athletic shoulders squaring, followed her.

"You needn't take it out of me because I'm not a clever talker," Dolores heard him say to Catherine, as, his hand at her elbow, he assisted her in the descent. "My stupidity is not inherited. It's a gift."

At a sound Dolores turned to see Jack looking on from his door. His eyes were wide and grave—in expression much like his father's. His head slanted exactly as the elder John held his. With his laboriously acquired, makeshift walk, he crossed the landing to stop before her.

"Something said to me——" he began; paused to think, and continued: "I guess I mean that myself said to myself that I'd better come out and 'tend to you. Maybe I'm foolish to worry about you, 'Lores, yet——"

"Yet," she supplied, as serious as he, "maybe you're not. Look after me, Jack. I need you, for you are my safest friend."

She took comfort in his elderly assurances; tried to throw off the prescience that weighed on her at the thought of Catherine's outraged look. But she was afraid.

Look high, look low, she was afraid.

CHAPTER XIII

AS proved by developments of the next day, Dolores need not have feared that Mrs. Cabot would blame her for the interest of the attractive young osteopath. Evidently she was of too sweet a nature for that. During the after-luncheon respite, when the girl sat reading in her room to avoid a possible repetition of yesterday's telepathic tête-à-tête, madame sought her in an exceptionally gracious mood. She was followed by her maid, who bore a long black-and-white striped box.

"Lay it on the bed, Annette."

Having dismissed the reluctant Frenchwoman, she turned to Dolores with a manner of affectionate anticipation.

"I saw it yesterday at Yungman's *revue*," she announced. "As it stayed on my imagination overnight, I sent Annette this morning to buy it."

"It?" Dolores tried to feel on faith something of Mrs. Cabot's pleasurable excitement.

"It's from *Angèle*, the colours copied from an overcast sunset, mostly grey, with just a suggestion through the mists of lavender and rose. And it's built of the clingingest stuff. I *hope* you'll like it."

"I am sure I shall. All your things are beautiful."

Dolores hovered over the tissue wrappings with the true girl's interest.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a voice soft as the fabric. "Oh!" —again, as Catherine lifted an evening gown on its satin-padded hanger and suspended it from the electrolier. The most stupid cynic could not have doubted the governess' worshipful gaze, and madame, while in many respects a cynic, was far from stupid.

"The lines of the manikin who wore it," Catherine added, "didn't compare with yours."

What had her "lines" to do with such a gown? Dolores looked the question.

"You are built for *décolleté*, my dear. The Marquis d'Elie remarked it only yesterday, after you'd sailed so gracefully from my rooms. Oh, you needn't scorn a compliment from him! He's a bit shy on discretion, according to American standards, but he has studied women as a fine art. What he said about your possibilities made me remember this model. Of course I shouldn't have considered it for myself."

"The dress, Mrs. Cabot, is for——"

"For you, silly. You can see at a glance that my colouring kills it." Catherine reassured herself of the fact in the mirror. "With your duo-tones—dark hair and alabaster hide—— The dress is a token of appreciation from Papa-John and Mamma-me over your success with our son. It is just a fine *Angèle* feather for our household angel."

"*Dear* Mrs. Cabot!"

Dolores' exclamation was the more emotional for the doubts which she had felt over her benefactress' sincerity towards herself. Lest she should reveal by word or look the self-recriminations that filled her mind, she returned to the gift;

touched its lax, silken folds; pressed to one cheek a wisp of its subtly tinted tulle.

"My first evening dress," she murmured, with a fervour which showed that admiration was fast deepening into possessive love. "Even though I haven't any present need of it——"

"But you have. You'll need it to-night." Catherine spoke positively. "Mr. Cabot has telephoned Bradish that an old friend of the family is to dine with us, and I want you to make a fourth at table. Rufus Holt is a university pal of John's and said to be the ablest divorce lawyer in New York. He never loses a case, perhaps because he can't be bribed to take the side of the person in the wrong. What's more, my dear, he's a bachelor."

"I'd enjoy meeting him, I'm sure, and you're very kind to ask me down, but, you see——"

"No, I don't." Catherine subtracted the half of her attention from the mirror and gave the whole to Dolores. "I don't see—and won't—any reason in the world why you shouldn't be more a member of this family. We are all very fond of you, and we know that you are superior to the position you occupy. Life has been against you, that's all. But I am for you. Haven't you realized that fact yet?"

"I do appreciate your kindness—all the kindness which has been shown me in your house, Mrs. Cabot."

"Then show your appreciation in my way. Don't spoil my pleasure by looking suspiciously on every decent deed I try to do. You act as if you thought I was jealous of your looks. Why, you make a wonderful foil for me! Several have spoken of it. Even Dr. Shayle, who, being red-headed himself, has a natural preference for brunettes, agreed with me yesterday that you and I are as different as two women could be. Do you know——"

Catherine hesitated, as if from modesty. When she continued, it was with that air of saying something especially thoughtful and original with which she now and then substantiated her claim to "brains."

"Of course everybody has some favourite type of feminine beauty. This man admires a woman in whom his best friend

can't see any charm. A third appreciates another whose good looks neither of the first two will admit. And so on. But about myself—— It is a strange thing that when I was a young girl, every artist who came to my father's house to examine those alleged 'old masters' I was telling you about used to beg to paint me. I remember one of them explaining it by the theory that a golden blonde is humanized sunshine —and that sunshine is something craved for by every one. Perhaps it sounds vain for me to repeat, but they were agreed that my type was the only one universally admired."

Far from thinking her vain, Dolores almost envied her the pleasure she could take in her own looks. People generally spoke of "the beautiful Mrs. Cabot," perhaps for just that reason—that people generally enjoyed sunshine.

"Now that I am trying to shed some few beams your way, you spoil the spirit of the thing right at the start. You might think of others besides yourself."

That the reproach had effect on Dolores was shown in the startled question of the purple-black eyes. Catherine proceeded:

"We're not so happy in this shell of a home but that we might be happier. I am not speaking of myself so much as —as my husband. He needs cheering up, and I, somehow, have lost the power to cheer him. I've thought that perhaps you could help. Despite his taciturnity, he likes you for what you have done for Jack. If you wouldn't be so shy with him, would just talk to him naturally, study him and try to please him, you know, you would be accomplishing—well, more than you can possibly realize. I'd be in your debt, not you in mine. You've never received anything approaching an order since you came to us, have you? Heaven knows, I don't wish you to consider anything I suggest in that light, but I *should* like you to join us at dinner to-night."

Rufus Holt was dapper in stature, but of an expansive personality. Although crinkled around the eyes and slightly bald, he had the spontaneity of eternal youth. From first glance, he directed toward Dolores a sort of friendly homage.

"I like the way you acknowledge an introduction," he con-

fided during their first five minutes. "The exaggerated delight with which almost everybody takes almost everybody else for granted *is* absurd, isn't it? Without a word, Miss Trent, you've done a rather remarkable thing—given a lawyer a brand-new thought."

Dolores was pleased that he so quickly found something about her to like. She expanded under his persiflage.

"I never learned 'manners' in any school," she deprecated, "but I've tried to teach myself by behaving like the people I admire."

"Well, give it up! I don't think you could act the least bit like anybody else if you tried, any more than——" The mirth lines around Holt's eyes uncrinkled, as, silently, he appreciated her in the mist-grey gown. "A dove couldn't waddle like a goose," he finished. "Don't let anybody change your first bow. It is perfect—no undue cordiality about it, any more than undue *hauteur*. You do it gravely, simply, hopefully. Just now you gave me one quick, inquiring glance to see whether you were glad to meet me, before you committed yourself by saying so. I'll take a bet you don't know my name."

Dolores looked embarrassed. "That wouldn't be a fair bet. You see, Mrs. Cabot told me beforehand."

"Honest, too! What are your faults?" He laughed.

Catherine returned to them from an aside with Bradish. If the governess looked a mauve-and-rose-breasted dove to the facile-tongued attorney, madame was a bird of Paradise, in her topaz velvet and high-massed, glinting, silver-gold hair. Her evening manner matched the brilliancy of her attire.

"Latest reports from the front are that John will be down—well, when John is down," she announced. "Things never happen in this house, even food, until John is down."

"It is gossip on the Street that some bricks of his Wall have caved in," Holt offered. "He never in his life kept a woman waiting unless obliged to. You see, Miss Trent, we men who know John Cabot like to brag about him. We consider him the best example extant of the fairness of the unfair sex."

"Oh, John's a hero, no doubt of that!" Catherine's out-

flung glittering hands illustrated her somewhat contemptuous attitude toward most things which others approved, her husband included. "Heroes are all right when one is young and unsophisticated, but they do seem stereotyped to a grown-up. Don't you think so? You always know exactly what they are going to do. The villains, now, are more interesting. There's some excitement in learning the worst about them—always a chance for something unexpected. They may even reform. *You* ought to agree with me, Rufus."

"I might," Holt returned, "but for certain suspicions as to which class you are consigning me. In all my comradeship with John I never felt sure of anything connected with what he was going to do, except that it would be the square thing when done."

The small controversy was closed by the appearance of its subject. As he stood looking in on them from the doorway—the master of the house—he was photographed on Dolores' memory. Clean-cut against the vista of the dim-lit foyer in his evening black and white, his hands depending stiffly, his head side-set, he suggested controlled power.

From his first surprised glance at herself, she realized that he had been unprepared for the presence of the governess. But his wife's expectant eyes also were upon her.

Licensed by the fact that she had not seen him for a couple of days, Dolores offered him her hand in greeting, and looked up into his face when he stooped to touch for the briefest of moments her finger-tips. Yesterday she would have veiled her admiration. To-night she had a prescribed part to play. She could not help regretting the overture, however, when she saw his smile recede; realized that he had turned, without a word, away from her. A pressure hurt her throat. But she cheered at Catherine's encouraging nod. Remembering those in-caving bricks of his down-town "Wall," she forgave the forbidding attitude of one said to be so just.

When dinner was announced, she obeyed Catherine's signal that she should take the arm of the host. On their stroll through the great hall toward the dining-room, she found occasion to thank him for the latest Cabot gift.

"The dress—that I gave you?" His tone was mildly exclamatory.

"You and Mrs. Cabot."

"So I gave you that dress?" he asked more easily. "Of course we *are* getting on toward Christmas. Then I am prepared for little surprises like this—have to go around, you know, asking everybody what I gave them. I wonder *why* —the dress?"

Dolores tried not to show how disconcerted she felt. "Mrs. Cabot said that it was because I get along so well with Jack, although that's nothing to reward me so beautifully for. Getting on with Jack is its own reward."

"To be sure," he murmured, as though his memory had been jogged. "To be sure," he repeated, his eyes upon the velvet V of his wife's back.

"No matter why you made the gift, Mr. Cabot, it is an event in my life. To-night is the first time I've ever been in evening dress."

At last he looked down at her and interestedly.

Dolores felt both pleased and abashed. Never, she realized, had she worn anything so becoming as this gown. Its delicate grey increased, rather than shamed the pallor and texture of her skin. Its rose seemed dimly to reflect the red of her lips, its mauve the deep purple of her eyes. Her hair, done low on her neck to hide as much as possible of the gleaming flesh which had not before been exposed to the eyes of man, made an oval, ebony frame for her face.

"Never having been a girl myself, I don't suppose I realize just what the first one means. Really, I didn't suppose I had such good taste." With which ambiguous comment he withdrew both eyes and interest. Evidently the subject of herself was dismissed.

Despite the lessons of her past, Dolores felt disappointed. The Rev. Alexander Willard had looked at her often and long. Seff had looked at her and looked again. As she went about the city, strangers filled her with uneasiness by their stares. She ought to have been glad that one man was superior to the attraction of looks which she had been forced to conclude

were unusual. She would be glad, yes. Yet she caught herself wishing that this man, on this occasion——

Through that never-to-be-forgotten dinner—the first formal one of her life—she made an effort to adapt herself as a unit of the quartette and to attend to Mrs. Cabot's converse with something the responsiveness of Rufus Holt. Her awe of Bradish and the second butler she conquered enough to sample the dishes passed. She became sufficiently accustomed to the candle-light to appreciate this and that detail —the drawn-work dinner cloth, the Sheffield service, the gleam of a fountain playing Nature's music in the conservatory beyond. She commented on the match of the fulvid, velvety orchids that formed the centre-piece with their hostess's gown. With the rest she sipped of a vintage recommended by their host as from the fore-stocked Cabot cellar.

"You'll go far these dry days and drink—well, perhaps too much, to find better Burgundy than this," he said. "It is neither too thick nor too thin; neither sweet nor sour; smooth and gentle, yet not heady. And the colour—— hasn't it the rich red of dreams come true?"

"Speaking of colour, John," the attorney suggested, "are you noticing the rare contrast between two ladies fair to-night?"

John Cabot nodded and glanced abstractedly into his wife's pleased, expectant face, but omitted altogether to look the governess's way.

"Thank Heaven, I'm single. *I* can enjoy such things." Holt laughed.

"You mean," John corrected, "that you can enjoy them out loud."

"Why can't you, John?" Catherine protested. "Naturally and connubially, you find it dull paying compliments to me, but certainly Miss Trent deserves a few. Why in the world don't you warm up?"

"I am warming up," he replied, his dry smile all for the wet wine in his glass.

She showed increased dissatisfaction over his impersonalities. "You sound and look distrait to-night. Are you

worried, dear? Rufus told us something about bricks falling on the Street. Is it true that you were hit?"

"Hard hit."

"You mean that you lost money?"

"Lost?" He spoke with vague surprise. "Can I ever lose? Alas, no. While the rumour-mongers were spreading the report which Rufus heard about my losses, I made—made—*made*."

"You funny, clever John! Tell me"—a gleam lit the wife's eyes—"was it much that you made?"

"Too much. It is disconcerting to gather in upward of a million unintentionally."

"A million? *John!* Won't you tell us how you did it? I never tire of your coups."

Dolores felt relieved, and extremely glad, to see her interest and pride in her husband. Surely not even the exacting Catherine could fail to care for such a man! In that moment between demand and response, she decided definitely to forget as unworthy of herself, of the mother of Jack, and of John Cabot, the presumptions of the Marquis d'Elie. Undoubtedly they were—well, just d'Elie's presumptions.

"And you never will tire, eh—so long as I win?" John's somewhat cynical glance transferred from his wife's heaven-blue eyes to those of his longtime friend. "I've spoken to you before, Rufus, of having been nagged for the past year by an idea that Europe has been suffering less from the effects of war than from the effects of peace. Some time ago I underwrote a loan to help the Poles against the Bolsheviki. With the 'Red' army threatening Warsaw from the north and east, it looked for a while as if my investment in real peace was to be wiped out."

"And to-day the cables brought the news——" inserted Holt.

"Exactly." John shrugged as if at catastrophe. "After Weygand broke the Russian centre and retired the right, none of the host that swept down on the Polish capital survived, except a handful of fugitives."

To this laconic recital of the high-finance of war, the feminine contingent listened with diverse interest. To Dolores

it was evident that, for their benefit, he had stripped of technicalities some gigantic map-changing feat to which he had played financial generalissimo. She, too, was stirred by his success, even though her casual perusal of newspaper headlines scarcely fitted her to grasp its entirety. From watching the grown-up of Jack's whimsical smile, she turned again to enjoy the reflex of triumph on Catherine's alert face.

"It would seem that your guardian angel is working overtime when you can't lose even to the grasping Soviet. Isn't it just *too* pathetic!" The unwonted gleam still lit her eyes, as she turned them upon the governess. "Can't you, my dear, say something to cheer this victim of good luck?"

At the direct appeal, Dolores straightened. She must not fail Mrs. Cabot, who was trying so kindly to bring her out, she adjured herself. To be dull, when so much had been done to brighten her, was rank ingratitude. She must be gay.

"Would that I were witty, like you good folk!" she wished, with a shy, admiring glance among them.

"But aren't you?" Holt asked.

"I used to try hard to be. I never was quite comfortable until I gave it up. It was like release from bondage when I decided one day to be just sincere. I do sincerely congratulate Mr. Cabot——"

"Don't you ever change your mind," the enthusiastic lawyer interrupted. "Scarce were we properly introduced, Miss Trent and I, when by this sincerity which she depreciates she thrilled me with a beautiful perception."

"How nice, Rufus, that you still thrill," Catherine commented, with a particularly guileless smile.

"Over anything that is good of its kind," he amplified. "Such success as I have had at the Bar, I owe to that capacity. To me nothing can be more thrilling than the sudden sight of human character. This perception that I have had—this beautiful sight that I have seen—perhaps, John, you will let me toast it with your wonderful wine?"

At his host's encouraging nod, Holt arose and fixed his eyes on the frieze with the twitching smile of inspiration. After a pause, he began:

"I do not give you Wine, Woman and Song. No, nothing

so new as that! But it is a song I give—a song of woman and wine. In varying vintages we drink inspiration from the sweetness or tartness, the smoothness, gentleness or headiness of women—we men. From the Cocktail Girl, of whom a little is enough, to good old Mother Cordial, who calms us with her seasoned satisfactions, we have much to enjoy. Here is Champagne."

Lifting from beside his plate the tall-stemmed glass half-full of bubbling amber, he bowed toward the yellow velvet vision.

"How it sparkles, infects our moods, dares us into animation! If only it would never let us down to normal again—would never cease to sparkle—Champagne!"

As if by chance, his boyish smile left Catherine's pleased face and strayed Dolores' way. With a kiss of the rim, he replaced the tall glass upon the cloth. His fingers loosed its slender stem; found a smaller glass; raised it.

"Once in a lifetime you meet a woman who is like this deep red Burgundy. Does it need to speak—the wine—to boast its colour, its fragrance, its power? See, it is too rich for the eye to penetrate; there is not a bubble in it to suggest its life; it is topped by no froth. All too quietly, it offers us sensation. And we sip of it—delight. We drink deep—intoxication.

"The woman who is like the deep, red wine—once in a lifetime we meet her. No need for her to laugh with us, to coquette, even to speak. Her personality is an alluring hue. She gives off a fragrance of soul that drowns gross thought. Without words she promises all emotions—life. She, like the wine, needs only to be.

"I do not give you Wine, Woman and Song; nothing so new as that. I sing, friends, an older song—*the* woman, man's wine!"

Silence held the little group as Holt ceased to speak. With his left hand he patted the bald spot upon his head, as if doubtful of the wisdom of having broached his "beautiful perception." Then, slowly, his smile reappeared, as though from frank pleasure over a creditable performance. With lifted glass he turned to their host.

Dolores also turned.

But John Cabot did not meet their gaze—either her own or that of his friend. And he did not speak. He was, however, the first to drain his Burgundy.

The girl wondered at the gleam in his eyes. Never had she seen him look that way before. It seemed soon for even so excellent a potion to have had effect.

CHAPTER XIV

FALLTIME was gone for the year. Yet in the rigours of winter a flower came to bloom in the heart of Dolores Trent. Petal-soft had opened the peace of her "to-day"; warm-hued glowed the hope of her "to-morrow." As though none such ever had pricked her mind were the thorn-fears of yesterday.

She first consciously viewed the miracle on a sharply bright afternoon, when she and young Jack had crossed the Avenue for one of the strolls in Central Park which she was teaching him to enjoy. The fact that she had reached content glinted into her realization from off the sunlight. The green grass surviving the patches of snow, the birds darting hither and yon on their unaccountable errands, the branches swaying tractably to the breeze—each sight and sound about them accented the harmony with Nature of her changed mood. Hitherto, memories of her past had spoiled the present with dread of what the future might be. To-day the past was crowded into its proper position as the mere background of her life. So full of enjoyment was the present that she seemed almost—*almost* to have reached the future.

Her mental state seemed to have blessed her charge like a benediction. No longer did the cripple's features twist into snarls at sight of more agile children at play. To his precocious mind had been submitted the law of compensation. Constantly reminding himself that there was meant to be no perfect earthly state, he compared nurse-maids and mothers unfavourably with his governess-pal; buttoned his coat thoughtfully when he passed a youngster in rags who could

run; tilted his head farther to one side when a rheumy-eyed wreck of a father on a bench pointed the contrast with that of his god-man, his "John Cabot."

"It *is* fun being happy," he asserted gnomically.

"It is—it is," she agreed, with conviction equal to his own.

"I think I have learned how to be happy more from you, 'Lores, than from Dick. But I don't mind acknowledging that I was all wrong about the way I treated him before you came. Don't you think he 'preciates, though, that I've tried to make it up to him? The way he pecks around my fingers when I hold his lettuce-leaf shows that he's not afraid of me any more. And the way he *sings*! 'Lores, when he perks his head on one side, just like John and me, and fixes his shiny eyes on mine—— D'you know, I think he is awful fond of me, 'spite of the way I acted. It makes me feel——" In the act of drooping, the over-large, brown-cropped head was thrown bravely back. "It makes me *ashamed*," he finished. "Don't you suppose we could let Dick out of the cage a while each day, just to give him a little the feeling that he's free?"

"Of course we could, Jackie. I am sure he'd soon learn to stay inside your rooms. He has more philosophy than you'd credit for his size, or he'd never sing as he does in a cage."

The lad's eyes up-flashed a radiant look. "I'd be relieved a lot to see Dick get something out of his life. I'd feel a better right to enjoy something awful wonderful that's going to happen to me to-day. You won't be cross that I've kept it a secret from you? I wanted to s'prise you. But I intended all along to tell you first of anybody. 'Lores——"

His slithering gait stopped in the centre of the path that he might grasp her two hands instead of the one. Through the fur lining of his gloves she could feel the jump of his pulse. Looking down, she saw a sort of solemn joy upon his wizened little face. From under the beautiful sweep of his lashes gleamed what she had not seen there before, tears.

"John's going to bring me the dog, 'Lores," he announced, in a voice surcharged with unchildlike feeling. "I never asked him again after that day—you know—the day you

came—when two of the gold-fish died? It was he took that magazine with the kennel advertisement I had marked. You remember that we never could find it? That was a long time ago and I was afraid John had forgotten. But he hadn't. I guess he never forgets anything. He saved the address and he's got me one of the breed of that picture. It means more to me than getting what he's never let me have, a live puppy. It means——"

"That your father trusts you now. Oh, Jack darling, I am so glad for you!" With emotion equal to his own, Dolores filled in when the child-voice broke.

"And, 'Lores"—excitement fortified him—"he's bringing it to-day—probably this very hour. I left word with Bradish the direction we were taking and just where we'd rest. But I guess, after all, we'd better go back. My dog mightn't like it if I wasn't at home when he arrived. Naturally he'll be anxious to get acquainted with his boy. Let's start back."

Despite Dolores readiness, he still hesitated.

"I kind of don't feel that I dare be so happy, 'Lores, when I know you get sorry sometimes. You're not to be sorry any more. I've explained to John about why I want to take care of you always. I'm not too little now to look after you, and when I grow up I intend to make you awful happy. I'd like to tell you now that special name for you that I——"

The girl had to lean low to catch his confession. But not for all the lesser joys of her life would she have missed it. On her knees in the gravel of the path she held him for one precious moment to her heart. Although quickly she restrained herself, in order not to offend his idea of big-boy decorum, and although the homeward pace set by his physical limitations was slow, she seemed to walk on air—seemed to have realized in her virginity the joy of motherhood.

For once Jack's anxiety to precede his hero home had been well advised. It took time to reach the nearest exit, then to retrace their steps up town along the pavement that fronted the park wall. Scarcely had they come opposite the Cabot block, when they saw John in riding clothes about to mount the white Arabian which was the chief of his relaxations

Scuttling to his side of the kerb, John, Jr., announced their return in his lustiest shout. Dolores understood the excitement which had snatched his hand from hers, when she noticed that a scraggly Airedale puppy was tucked under the left parental elbow.

For the moment the "Stop" sign of the traffic policeman at the crossing just below had cut off the flow of vehicles. John Cabot, hearing and seeing his son, returned to the groom the reins of his horse. By neck-nap he held up the wriggling symbol of re-established faith; then, stooping, he set the young dog on his feet and started him across the street to meet the lad who had earned his ownership.

Jack's whistle of encouragement was out-shrilled by the "Go" blast from below. The puppy, despite the wobbliness of his legs, evidently had lived to learn. The louder the whistle, the stronger the canine obligation. His stub tail straight up, his square-chopped jowl low, his ears flat-pointed toward his goal, he set off in form that would have done proud his bull-terrier and otter-hound ancestors towards the policeman down the street.

Jack went after him. At a pace of which Dolores would not have believed him capable, with his over-long arms outstretched and his head lopping well to one side, he slithered regardlessly into the crush of traffic. As one, the father and the governess realized his danger. From opposite kerbs, both started after him. The Airedale, although debarred by youth from discrimination, showed that he had inherited speed. But Jack, urged beyond thought of self by desire to rescue his new and dear possession, gained in the pursuit. Lunging close, he reached for the waggling stub tail. Almost did he grasp it. Almost did he, as well as the dog, reach the safety zone.

On the right side of the Avenue, John Cabot had been hindered by the up-streaking cars. On the left, Dolores might have been in time, except that a misguided citizen, seeing a woman rush directly in front of a heavy car, laid violent hands upon her and dragged her back. Her shriek mingled with the automobile's siren. Above both warnings the traffic whistle shrilled and shrilled again.

The movement of the street scene suddenly ceased. Each car was brought up short. Pedestrians stood to stare, as if under some horrid spell. Even the puppy paused at the repetition of the command which before had moved him. At the worst possible moment for the continuation of the house of Cabot, a sport car had spun round the corner.

The case was one of the present-day many, too brief for emergency brakes. The tyres smoked with the startled driver's shout. But from the victim there came not the slightest protest.

In another moment, all was motion again. John Cabot gathered the lax form of his son into his arms. A detached look was on his face as he answered the questions of the policeman and other eye witnesses. But while he nodded vaguely, and gave his name and address in a quiet voice, he remembered everything, even the puppy. Dolores took up the search of his eyes, followed and picked up the confused little dog. She felt a resentment very like hate at the insinuating way he wagged his tail, as though trying to humbug her into approval of his conduct. When she rejoined John——

"Come, Dolores," he said.

Always before he had called her "Miss Trent."

When they reached the wrought-iron gate into the Cabot grounds, he stepped aside for her to precede him. That he should think of the puppy and her before himself——

Even in that first full hour, she was impressed by these small remembrances. They told her more of the man than all the greater things which had been credited to him.

She it was who led the way around the clustered shrubbery and past the dryad of the cynical smirk. At the steps she had to right herself from stumbling. Although she was not weeping, she could not see.

"Jackie. . . . *Jack!*"

She had not spoken his name, merely thought it in a hurting dread for herself as well as for him. Was catastrophe always to follow her? Had she brought it upon the boy by growing so close to him through love? That name he had revealed—his "secret" name for her—had that aught to do with the close-heeling of tragedy?

"Other-Mother," was what he had called her.

Other-Mother!

No! The accident was to have been. It could not occur because he had whispered that precious name. With passionate jealousy, she defended his tribute. She would—she *must* have that.

About midnight and quite unexpectedly, Jack became conscious. His mind seemed to open with his eyes. He saw his father first, seated on one side of the historic bed, then he glanced about until he found Dolores on the other.

From the outer room could be heard the deep breathing of the celebrated surgeon who had performed the operation. He had preferred to spend the night there, awaiting results. The nurse, too, had been persuaded to a brief rest, since Mr. Cabot and the governess elected to keep the watch.

The mother who, all the evening, had been in a state of grief bordering on hysteria, had retired to her own apartment with one of her headaches, and Dr. Shayle. A remark made to the osteopath in a calm voice, however, had suggested that already she had found relief from the shock.

"It will be better when it is all over," she had said, turning with one of her quavering, childlike smiles from placing a rose between her son's unresponsive fingers. "A lame lad couldn't have gone far in this rapid age."

Dolores, overhearing, felt a sensation new to her. By contrast with its violence, she knew that it was not hate she felt for the puppy. This was the first hate that had racked her—this feeling about Catherine Cabot. "All over"—his mother to anticipate *that*!

Now that the boy's eyes had opened and widened with relief to find herself and John by the bed, the suggestion seemed more inhuman than before. She reached across to take away the rose of such cruel suggestiveness.

But Jack's fingers closed around the stem. His lips moved.

Both she and his father leaned close.

"Evening, John Cabot."

"Jack Cabot, good evening." In an effortful murmur the older John made his usual reply.

"And you, 'Lores—— I'm glad you're both—don't have anyone else——" Jack's voice dwindled. Soon he roused again. "If a picture was taken—of my heart—it would show—just two faces—John's and 'Lores'. You'll take my place, John—with 'Lores? You'll try to make her happy—like I meant to do? She never was—happy, you know—until she and Dick and I——"

The father's whispered reassurance Dolores tried not to hear, just as she tried not to see the look on his face. But without ears or eyes she must have heard and seen. Her heart was near breaking with grief for the two Johns.

"Anything you decide—all right with me. I can trust—her with you. I'd like to see—my dog."

Dolores lifted the young Airedale, which had been biting at her skirt, to the edge of the bed, and kept her hand on his collar while he wobbled over the coverlet and licked, in his boisterous, insinuating way, the outstretched hand of "his boy." Soon she drew him away and replaced him on the floor, where he whimpered and coaxed to get up again.

John, the while, had replaced the rose in his son's searching hand.

They two sat watching the fingers that began to tear apart its petals.

"You are wasting your rose, Jackie dear," Dolores said, to keep his thoughts distracted from the puppy.

He paused, but evidently not at her protest. The twittering of his canary in the other room seemed to disturb him.

"Poor Dick, he's taking it hard," he said, and returned to the destruction of the rose.

After all the petals lay plucked on the coverlet, he gathered them up in both hands. His gaze, too, settled on the sight of the crimson life-leaves sifting through his pale fingers.

"See, they look prettier—and smell sweeter—than before," he urged, his voice loudening from his effort to reassure them. "The rose isn't wasted. Nothing ever is. Even I—am not wasted. I've never been what other boys are, but I'm glad I've lived long enough to 'preciate you, John. Maybe if I hadn't—you and 'Lores——"

His voice was cut by a hurting gasp. They hovered close

over him, watching the changes—from physical pain to mental relief—which drifted like sunshine after shadows over his face.

Dolores would gladly have died to save him one pang, yet all she could do was to share his suffering. Her heart stopped beating from relief when the dark, appealing lashes swept back again. From far away, yet intensely, he looked up at them.

"Remember, John and 'Lores, *nothing's—ever—wasted.*"

As he spoke, a light not from the night lamp was shafted into the room. Direct as a search-ray it found his face and settled there.

At its touch Jack lifted to one elbow on the pillow, forgetful of pain; he gazed with an alert look into its unearthly radiance; he leant his head to one side, as if listening.

"I will come. I am coming," he said.

"No, not yet, Jack—don't go yet!"

At last moved from his outer calm, the father threw forward his body to screen off the sourceless shaft. But not the faintest shadow showed. Through his brawn the light glowed steadily. With a groan, he slid to his knees beside the ancestral bed, and stretched clutching hands across the counterpane as if longing, yet not daring, to drag back into the semi-gloom the last of his line.

His appeal sounded desperate—tortured from him.

"How can you leave me, boy? You're part of me, Jack Cabot. Don't you realize that? You're all that I have. Don't go yet awhile, my son—little crushed bone of my bone!"

Perhaps Jack heard. Perhaps he would have preferred to wait, if only for the "while" that his man-god craved. But his eyes did not lower from the blinding light, or his head relax from its listening slant. Any desire which he may have had to stay was overruled by the authoritative Command that had reached him. In a last effort to reassure the beloved two he must leave behind, he tried to smile—was able to whisper:

"I'm not — afraid. . . . I see — the way . . . the light——"

Through the numbness that made one pain of her heart and her head, Dolores remembered afterwards that unpre-

cedented midnight twittering which had disturbed the boy. Softly, so as not to awaken the great surgeon, she crossed the living-room to the window. The canary greeted her with no flutter of wings. She lifted the cage off its hook, carried it into the bedroom, and placed it beside the night lamp.

She and John Cabot stood in the utter silence which seemed to fill the world, looking through the wires at the fluffed, yellow body that lay upon the floor of the cage. Indeed Dick had taken it "hard." Jack's wish for the small creature, whose large love had made him "ashamed," had been fulfilled. His bird, too, had gone—set free.

CHAPTER XV

IN justice to John Cabot, the spirit-girl Dolores related next an interview between the financier and his wife of which she was told afterward. So she explained to her demon audience, when able to proceed.

Three days had passed since that incomprehensible thing misnamed on Earth as "life" had departed the unsightly physical shell of the young heir. The great surgeon, after having established—to his own satisfaction at least—that the patient had died of "nerve shock," and not of an operation which he pronounced successful in all details, had departed with his cheque. The servants were recovering from the emotional debauch of the last offices, and were beginning to think consciously, rather than subconsciously, in terms of tasks.

The governess, immediately on her return from the cemetery where had been consigned to dust her second safe love, had sought the boy's mother in her boudoir. She had come, she said, to express her appreciation of the many kindnesses heaped upon her, and to announce her departure, since her engagement had come to so sudden and sad an end.

Catherine, however, had insisted that she must stay on in the house; in a pitiful outburst she had clung to her as the one who had been nearest and dearest to the departed lad. Time enough later to decide in what capacity she should remain.

Her gentle companionship was "comforting" to the bereaved mother. She must not "desert."

Dolores had hesitated, riven with doubts. She felt that she should go. Yet she longed to stay. Catherine was suffering from one of the headaches which would seem to have become chronic. Fragrant and pale as a valley-lily in her crêpe, she looked a lovely child, dependent upon kindness. Dolores glanced away from the dew-wet eyes, and compared her own sense of loss with what a mother's must be. Although she had not forgotten that brutal anticipation of Jack's death, hate hurt. Catherine looked in need of forgiveness, and she—— She *needed* to forgive.

She was considering the somewhat vague disposal of her near future when Mr. Cabot knocked. Prompted by the set look of his face and his grave manner, she at once excused herself, and left them alone. Following is the conversation between them, as reported to her later on.

"This is the first time for several years that you, my wedded lord, have visited my rooms. To what do I owe the rather unusual honour?" Catherine asked.

"To a rather unusual request."

John did not draw up the chair towards which she had waved him. He stood through the interview—stood or paced from one object to another of the luxurious room. At times he stopped quite near the *chaise longue* where she sat propped up by cushions, to study her guileless face, and the suffering air with which she sniffed a gold bottle of salts.

"The boy is dead, Catherine."

"Yes, John."

"I loved the boy."

"I believe you did. Still, he must have been a great disappointment to a fine specimen like you."

The compliment was repeated in her appreciative, uplifted gaze. But he felt far from pleased.

"You will oblige me by not referring to Jack's infirmity again. He was the only creature I've had to love since my mother, and I loved him as he was. You and I, Catherine, should be the last to depreciate him for what he symbolized."

"Symbolized? Oh, don't tell me that again!"

"Your criticism forces me to remind you. Outwardly our son was the symbol of our malformed union."

"*John*, what a grim thought!"

"Grim as the inheritance law—even to the third and fourth generation. He paid the price in his person of our crime in giving him birth. Through our fault, not his own, his body was warped and his temper uncertain. I often remembered, when I looked at him, that no amount of love was enough to atone for the wrong we had done him. I, for one, am grateful that we three were spared the greater punishment. So easily, in the sardonic scheme of things, the soul of him, too, might have been warped. But his was as gallant and large and sweet as ever outgrew injustice."

The implications against herself had turned Catherine to one of the many mirrors conveniently placed.

"How can you take such stern pride in your loyalty? You used to say, you know, that you loved me."

He, also, studied her reflection.

"I suppose you would call that a self-respecting statement? All right, we'll give it the benefit of my doubt that it is mere vanity. I did love what I thought you were. But that was taken away, like my mother—like Jack."

She showed the flurry that caught her up whenever inspired by one of her "brainy" thoughts.

"Has a man a right to think things about a woman which aren't true, marry her on the strength of them, and then blame her for the rest of their unnatural lives because he made a mistake?"

"In our case I had—every right. Have you forgotten the details of our first meeting, Catherine? Your father had invited me to the house really to see you, not the pictures that he hoped to sell to me. Your mother had selected me, sight unseen, by virtue of my bank account. They helped you to make an impression on me, which all of you knew to be false. You were dressed in white, which you afterward told me you never expected to wear again until your funeral. You looked innocent and tender and dependent—all of which you were not. You sat upon a hassock and played with a white Persian kitten—oh, every detail of the studied effect made a

lasting impression upon me! You had well-developed claws then, but you held them in far more carefully than did the kitten. Later, I learned, with quite a shock, that you detested cats. You held this one to your cheek and understudied its appeal to the best of your ability."

"Thanks for admitting that I have some sort of ability," the gentle voice purred.

"You have more than ability. You have positive power."

"My dear John! But don't pay me all your stored-up compliments in one visit. Save some—and call again."

"You have that most potent of acquisitive forces, unassailable egotism. I used to look into the faces of the painted parasites riding along Fifth Avenue in their cars, and wonder why so much was laid at their feet. That was before I learned —*you*."

"To think that you, John, should learn anything from me!"

"Egotism is the most acquiring force in the world. All great men have it, but in them it is covered or excused by their greatness. All women successful with men have it to the degree of a sort of hypnotism. They blind men to what they are with the bright light of what they think they are. You, for instance, think so well of yourself that one needs strong lenses to see your faults. I used to hope that you'd dim some day—have a doubt of yourself. But you never did. You are all strength in your egotism."

Hard words they were, yet sadly spoken. During them, the beautiful subject had wavered between pique and pleasure. At their finish, she offered her child-sweet laugh.

"After this, I can refuse you nothing. Name the rather unusual favour which you say you have come to ask!"

"I wish you, Catherine, to get a divorce."

"You—*you* want a divorce?"

Astonishment overcame both pique and pleasure.

"The boy was our only link. Now that he is gone, free me. You may have the money—as much of it as you want. I can make more. Of late I've had forced on me plenty of that which is my value in your eyes. I'll try to meet any demands you make. You see, I assume that you have no reason

other than money for keeping up this pretence any longer."

"So, it has come to this?"

Both face and form relaxed as she coaxed the cushions to give her greater comfort. The astonishment in her eyes had been replaced by shrewdness; that, in turn, by mild amusement. But the golden lines of her eyebrows were arched, as always when she was at mental tension.

"Do you intend this request, my hitherto immaculate John, to be taken as a confession of guilt?"

"*Guilt?*"

The one repeated word, weighted by disgust, was the whole of his denial.

"Whence—where—how, then, a divorce, without *cause*? Are we not citizens of the supposedly respectable commonwealth of New York?"

"There is Reno."

"*Reno!*" As if from force of her emphasis, Catherine sprang up from her lounge, crossed the room and faced him. "So you've been calculating on Reno? A nice, chivalrous plan—for *me* to endure such tedium and long-suffering to oblige you with a divorce! Four days' train travel from New York, and six months' residence in a Wild West town in the kind of hotel that has only one bath to a floor and wouldn't know what you meant by *à la carte* if you spelled it backward and translated it into Indian. My dear husband, what could you offer that would repay me for one of those awful exiles in Nevada's make-believe metropolis?"

"What sum has d'Elie named?"

"*John!* Are you trying to insult me?"

"No, Catherine. I am trying to settle with you."

For a tight-strung moment, man and wife regarded each other, he not unkindly, she with twisting lips. The next she turned and began to glide from object to object of the room, as if she too were strange to them. When she again stopped before him, her face had beautified. She laid a hand upon his arm.

"Tell me, *why* a divorce, dear?"

"Why not a divorce?" His eyes held forbiddingly on the clutch of her polish-pointed fingers. "We need not go

into unnecessary explanations. I understand something of your ambitions, and shall be glad to help you to achieve them. You will wear a title well—one thing that I could never give you. And you'll do better, I am sure, with a man whose devotion is for hire."

"A beautiful sentiment, as Clarke Shayle would say," she commented. "It is fortunate that I didn't marry you for any supposed amiability. As for yourself?"

"As for myself——" He flung off the hand that still clung, a note of passion in his voice. "Has your memory utterly failed you, Catherine? Can't you or won't you remember what I used to be? Once I tried to make you understand something of what I hoped from life and love. Do you suppose that it has been comfortable for me to appear a stone man? You don't want me. Let me find a life—perhaps even love—for myself. Oh, Catherine, you used at least to seem kind in the early days! Try to be a little kind again."

"Just kind enough to free you. And *she*?"

Certainly there was no promise in the bite of her response or the curiosity with which she eyed the emotion on his face.

In reply to her question, John Cabot simply looked at her—a warning look, known and feared on the Street.

"This lady with whom you hope to find life and love—did she suggest the plan to lay me on the shelf?" Catherine inquired. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, they say. Of course I can't blame her for wishing to take advantage of poor Jack's death by——"

"That will do, Catherine." He voiced the warning look. "There is no other woman in my life."

As if relieved of an unhappy suspicion, she lifted a smile of the self-believing sort, which ten years before would have blinded him to the lies behind her lips.

"Then why," she asked, "suggest the Union Pacific—the road to Reno? How can you, a mere husband, feel sure that you know your wife's heart? I defy the laws of Nevada or any other state to give you the key. What if I should say that I still want you?"

"You cannot say that and speak the truth."

In his positiveness, she saw that her past power to beguile him was indeed gone. But no ineffectualness on that account depressed her, as was proved by the light laugh with which she returned to the pleasanter assurances of her mirror.

"You are right. I hope you are as grateful as I am that I can't. I'd be bored to extinction with the ordinary state called 'marital bliss,' either with a man who doted upon me or one upon whom I doted. Fact is——" Bending closer to the glass, she focused into the twin pair of eyes a look of assured capability, "I never did care for you. Lately I quite dislike you. You are, you know, so superior. I don't wish to be superior myself and I resent people who are. There now! You say that you like honesty—won't you give me a good mark?"

With one of her unaccountable transitions, her manner changed from frank spite to pathos. Brushing her hand across her eyes, as if to hide from him any sign of the feeling to which she had declared herself immune, she crossed to the window, and leaned, looking out, against the effective background of its bronze hanging.

"No, my only husband—the answer is no." The cynicism in what she said was weakened by the way she said it. "I'm sorry to refuse any little request of yours, but I cannot give you up. And I don't think, really, that you have been quite nice. Since the challenge was to come from you, you might have been heroic enough to let me name the weapons—swords or pistols, you know—that impossible Reno or New York. Don't you think yourself that you have added insult to injury?"

He did not dignify the appeal with a reply. He was about to go, had bowed to her formally and was crossing to the door.

"John, dear."

Her quavery cry stopped him on the threshold.

She followed him and stood with her gold-gloried head hung low over her twisting hands. "You say that I have lost all kindness, John. I think *you* have. You are not what you used to be, any more than I am. You haven't had a thought

for me in what you ask. Perhaps a man cannot realize what it means to a woman to—to be faced with a demand like yours of to-day. For me to divorce you for deserting me—to admit to our world that you have tired of me—even supposing there is nothing to me but what you say, don't you know that would crucify my vanity? But there is more to me, John. I once *was* that kitten-girl you thought me. At times—even yet—I have my softer feelings. I am used to compliments, and I—I am hurt to the heart by your insult."

John did not take advantage of her pause. He continued to wait and wonder.

"I see far less beautiful women than I being understood and appreciated," she continued after a quivering sigh. "Is it too much that I ask to be endured? Yet, I don't want to ask that—I don't really. I want you to be happy, but—— Oh, John, why couldn't you have waited until I'd recovered? What with the accident and poor Jack's death and the funeral and now *this*, I feel that I've had almost more than I can stand. My head aches——"

Again she paused. Again the man did not speak.

"Dr. Shayle says that I ought to go away somewhere for a change of air and scene," she continued after a moment, in a lower, more pathetic voice. "I was hesitating, in my mistaken viewpoint, feeling that I shouldn't leave you in the house alone just at this time. But after what you've said to me, I see that you'd be glad to have me go. I'll start to-morrow for—for somewhere—anywhere."

Soon her sobs allowed her to add: "I'll think things over while I'm gone, dear. Perhaps, when I get used to your idea, it won't sound so brutal as it does to-day. I *might* come to see it more your way. Or perhaps you will miss me enough to—to——"

He realized that she was giving him every chance, but still failed to improve it.

With only a reproachful glance for his lack of generosity, she changed the subject. "I want to speak to you about one thing in particular. It's Miss Trent. As you may know, I have conceived an unusual affection for her. I don't feel that we should send a young creature of her beauty and fatal charm

out into the world again. On account of her devotion to Jackie and the wonderfully good influence she exerted over him, I feel the responsibility of seeing her safely settled, either with us or elsewhere. She is really quite refined. And how her looks came out in that evening dress I—we gave her! For one, I don't intend that the he-wolves outside shall get on the trail of a girl who was so dear to our—our boy."

"Your sentiments do you proud, Catherine."

"Don't be sarcastic, John. You may think that I have no heart, but there are people who wouldn't agree with you. Dolores, for instance. I show her every day my appreciation for what she did for Jack."

"And I intend to show mine," John inserted quietly, "by some suitable arrangement and provision. Jack's last request was that I should look after her. I, too, have a high opinion of Miss Trent."

"Then do, John, unbend toward her! You treat her—really—like a servant in the house. It offends my finer sensibilities to see how afraid the poor thing is of you. You can't doubt her devotion to the boy. Try to realize, as I do, that her heart is aching for him almost as much as our own. Be kinder to her while I'm gone, won't you, John?"

"Don't worry. I shall be kind to her."

"I do thank you for that promise. You're a dear. I should have worried for fear that you'd hurt her hypersensitive feelings in some way—as—as you've hurt mine. You see, she has agreed to stay on in the house until I get back. I've made her believe that I need some one above Morrison to look after things in my place."

"In that case," said John, "I can move to one of the clubs."

"Oh no," she protested. "Dolores would suspect that you had been driven out of your home, and she would be most uncomfortable. It isn't at all necessary for you to go."

"Pardon me, I think it is."

He left her, disappointed and dismayed. The "mere husband" of her accusation, he felt that he must have misunderstood his wife. That affection for him should outweigh her

cupidity seemed incredible. Yet what else could have prompted her refusal of his "rather unusual" request?

CHAPTER XVI

THE week following Mrs. Cabot's departure from her Fifth Avenue mansion was one of poignant loneliness for Dolores Trent. Strangely enough, however, she refused such companionship as offered. When good Mrs. Morrison urged that she should come down to the cheerful first-floor parlour at tea-time or in the evenings, she pleaded the necessity of brushing-up the languages upon which she depended for her next position. So painful to one of her yielding habits were her frequent refusals to see Dr. Shayle, that she left a standing "Not-at-home" with those who answered the door and telephone.

With none to give her orders, she looked for things to do, and tried to the full of her gentle authority to maintain discipline in the establishment, as when the Cabots were at home. That, so far as she knew at the time, was madame's chief reason for leaving her in charge. Tactfully she submitted suggestions for increased orderliness to the housekeeper. She instructed the yard-man according to her own ideas of the winter needs of the trees and shrubs under his charge. A stable-boy, suspected of mistreating his master's mount, she brought to confession and a quixotic zeal to make amends.

The Airedale terrier, that now was not to know the joys of owning his own "boy," she made her particular charge. Although she had resented him from first sight, she came to take a vicarious pride in his up-bringing and his points. Through Jack's eyes, she watched his development out of puppyhood into promising young dogship; daily she brushed the harsh tan coat over which the outlines of a black saddle were already forming; she noted with interest that, although scarcely two months old, his eyes were turning black; she attended his diet herself, lest his canine voracity should weaken the bones of his front legs, now straight as two gun-barrels. In time she felt for him a comradeship even greater than Jack's

would have been. Was he not in the same, culpable position which had saddened her youth ? Had not another died for him ?

She did not realize how much his demonstrative preference for her company had gained upon her, until one night when awakened from her early sleep by the ache of loneliness. She decided to join him in Jack's living-room, where he was allowed to dream his puppy dreams curled up on the foot-stool that stood as of yore before the lame little autocrat's arm-chair. Slipping a warm robe over her nightgown and loose hair, she tiptoed in mules along the landing and into the suite of so many memories. Scarcely had she closed the door when the puppy rose to receive her. Although he stood a picture of preparedness in the centre of the room, instinctively posing after the traditions of his Kennel Club ancestry when on hunt or show-bench, the waggle of his short, flagstaff tail and certain quivers of his stiff chin whiskers assured her that he was delighted she had come.

Dolores returned his greeting with more than usual cordiality. She rubbed the level of his back with her foot, and stooped to scratch the section of his forehead between the small V-shaped ears, when he kissed effusively her bare ankles.

She straightened ; and for a moment stood listening. The room was very quiet—much quieter than usual. She glanced at the grandfather clock which had ticked through so many generations of Cabots. The living John had tinkered it to outlast the life of his heir, and it had made good his boast. Reproachfully Dolores eyed the " calm " face which Jack had approved. Indeed, a clock needed to be " calm-faced," when its office was ticking lives away.

The hour-hand was close to eleven. But the hour didn't matter. Nothing mattered except that Jack was gone. With the thought, she turned towards the closed bedroom door. Impossible—almost too impossible for belief it seemed that he was not sleeping within. Comparing to-night with other nights when she had crept in to assure herself that his sleep was sound, the past seemed real, the now the unreality. Surely he would be hunched up beneath his eider-down and satin just as usual.

Moved by her longings, the girl continued across the living-room; opened, then closed behind her the bedroom door and stopped beside the bed. Its absolute flatness, the neat roll of the comforter between its foot-posts, the prim set of the pillows at its head—all filled her with realization keen as actual disappointment. She bunched up the pillows, threw herself upon them and shook out the comforter over her. With a sob, she tried to clasp to her heart the delusion that a twisted little shape lay within her arms.

Before she fell asleep, Dolores realized that the puppy had followed her into the room. He had hidden under the bed, evidently, until eased of fear over his temerity. Her resistance of the whimpers with which he soon grew emboldened kept her awake for a time. What was he—stupid, brute atom—that he presumed to offer comfort for her human loss? Had not he himself deprived her? Quite roughly she pushed away his exaggeratedly shivering body, and repulsed his suggestion that he, too, was lonely. Let him continue to hide from her sight—let him die of his loneliness! Yet——in those little-girl days of long ago, had *she* died, willing though she might have been to offer that apology for her existence? What would she have done if the father whom she had deprived had not been merciful to her?

A damp nose in her down-stretched palm emphasized the question. She should remember that the creature was not hers to mistreat. Jack would want his dog given the benefit of every doubt. She picked up the recent bundle of canine pathos—now one of exuberant joy—and permitted him to wriggle down upon the coverlet.

A sound louder than his dream barks, then a movement more definite than the twitching of the four feet co-ordinating with the speed at which he imagined himself running, awakened her. Against the slivers of light which outlined the door-frame, she saw that the puppy was standing at attention—hind legs thrust well back, bristles stiff, nose close to the sill. She sat up and shook herself wider awake. Some one had entered the sitting-room and made a light.

It would be better to announce her presence inside than have the dog bark the announcement for her. With the idea of

returning to her own chamber, she gathered her dressing-gown close round her and opened the door.

There she stood absolutely still. Everything seemed to halt with her feet—the beat of her heart, all capability of moving or speaking, even any sense of surprise.

Powerless as she felt, so John Cabot looked.

He was sitting in Jack's arm-chair, beside the lamp, and was looking at her. The parts of Jack's broken, pace-setting toy were spread out on the table. In both hands he clutched the torn magazine in which the boy had drawn a circle around the dog of his choice. He was pale and gaunt.

From the look of him, he must have imagined her a vision—and she made no move to undeceive him. He was convinced of the reality of the moment by the puppy. Holding aside the frisking beast, he straightened and forced himself to speak.

"You mustn't stay here, Dolores."

His words, his frown, his harsh tone—all stabbed into the wound of her solitariness as she had not been stabbed when alone. She could not manage an answer, except to cross to the hall door. Then, just as her hand turned the knob——

"For God's sake, don't leave me—don't go!" At her distressed hesitation, he added a jumble of words. "There is something I've been wanting to say to you—to offer—about your future. Forgive me if I seem abrupt or rude. I feel the strain of—of recent events. It might help to talk with some one who understands. Won't you stay—a little while?"

Dolores felt more hurt than when he had spoken first, but hurt for him. Knowing the steel control of the man, she wondered at his mood. She returned into the room and stood before him, one thought clear in her mind. So this, then, was what she had been awaiting all along—this need for companionship of John Cabot?

Usually so punctilious about the courtesies, he remained seated, his knuckles whitening in his grip of the crumpled magazine. That he now avoided looking at her filled her with the equivocal sensations of hope and fear which had unsteadied her that night of the dinner. But she tried not to feel for herself. She wanted all she was to feel for him. She saw that he was making an effort to get himself in hand

and wished that she might help him. Yet she hesitated to speak lest she sounded some discordant note.

"I thought it was only Jack that I was lonely for—that sitting in his room, among his things—but I was deluding myself. I know that now. The sight of you—— Well, it has not calmed me."

All too brief a glance he lifted to her startled eyes.

"If I seem strange or—or incoherent—— Dolores, you never could imagine such loneliness as I've been suffering. Every night since I moved to the club, I've been obsessed with the desire to come here. Last night I tramped the street until five in the morning to wear out the wish. But to-night it came back stronger than before. It has half crazed me—worn me out. I—I am run down, I guess. I feel like the last half-second of an eight-day clock."

At his simile the girl glanced towards the corner. The hour hand of the tall old time-piece was exactly where it had been, close to eleven. She realized now why the silence had seemed so intense when she had first entered the room. Shocked, she leaned closer to John Cabot.

"Jack's clock," she murmured. "I wound it only yesterday. It has stopped."

As he, too, turned and looked, his face reflected her superstitious tone. The quiet increased. Everything in their world seemed to have stopped.

The young Airedale broke the pause. With a whine and one paw, he importuned the master's lax-hanging hand. John pushed him away.

"I owe you worse than nothing, puppy. I meant Jack to be considerate of you, but not that he should die for you."

The dog appeared to understand; at least, he raised his head and howled dismally.

To hush his weird lament, Dolores sank down upon the hassock which never more would rest a pair of shrunken legs, dragged the wretched alien out from under the chair, stroked and patted him.

"He didn't intend that Jack should die for him," she interceded. "He didn't intend anything—any more than I intended that my mother should die for me. I try not to

hate him. I am sure Jack would know and be distressed if I did. He's just a foolish puppy."

" ' And what is folly, but a riotous expenditure of will ? ' " muttered John. His hand sought the head of the dog for the importuned caress, but spasmodically clasped around Dolores'. He leaned toward her, although with eyes turned away, as he continued to quote : " ' There are to will, and to have your will. There are your social ideas, your immoderate desires, your excesses, your pleasures that end in death, your sorrows that quicken the pace of life. For pain is perhaps but a violent pleasure.' "

Then he looked at her. His eyes, dark and brilliant through a surface film, asked her consideration. Never had she seen such misery. She had thought that it could only be felt in the heart.

" Do you believe that ? " he demanded. " Is the pain that is wrecking me only a form of pleasure ? "

Dolores doubted her voice, but she forced it. It sounded as unsteady as her thoughts. " I wish I knew what to say ; I—I cannot endure to see you so unhappy. I wish I knew——"

" There is no heartbreak except deliberate sin. That I keep telling myself," he interrupted. " If I am true to Jack's trust, true to myself, true to you——"

His hand slid to her wrist ; and hesitated there.

" But with the best I can do, I am breaking. Everything has combined to weaken my resistance. Jack, who was your protector, died, and immediately after him the canary. To-night the clock that has not missed a minute for three generations of us—even the old clock gives up."

" Do you remember what Jack said," Dolores reminded, " that nothing is wasted ? Maybe——"

" Don't start me on that train of thought," he objected harshly. " It maddens me. If Jack and his restraining influence were to die—if we were to meet here to-night—if time for us was to stop——"

He clutched her other arm and passed both hands to her shoulders. One remained there. The other continued around her neck ; forced her face to lift to his ; clung to her throat.

The pulse of his fingers beat against the pulse just under her chin.

"Look at me, Dolores. Keep me seeing the surprise in your eyes. Do you realize that you have only your inexperience to protect you?"

The woman was glad to obey. She looked and looked. And as she looked, she saw her heaven—at last her home. Something lifted that for long had lain a dead-weight on her heart, a question that now wafted like a fragrance from her lips.

"You care—for me?"

"Dolores. . . ."

"You have longed for me as I have longed for you?"

"Didn't you know that from the first? I tell you in order to implore you—don't trust me. I am no longer strong, Dolores. Against my will, against Jack's faith—life, position, integrity—everything is a trifle to me except the need to know—— Dolores, will you try to understand? Will you forgive and pity me? I am terrified for you. You must be stronger than I."

She did not appear to have heard him.

"You love me, then. You *love* me."

Over and over again the answer to her question gave sweet form to her lips. Her head fell back. Her eyes pursued his.

The young Airedale, convinced at last that he was unwelcome, emerged from under the chair, gave them a reproachful look, then trotted out of the room. His exit seemed to impress John anew with their aloneness. He drew up and away from her.

"Remember," he warned, "that hopelessness is a dangerous state. So long as I had hope, I was strong. Now that I am hopeless—hopeless——"

It was then that he told her of his interview with Catherine. Knowing his wife as most did not, he could not hope to change her private and particular reasons for refusing to free him. As Clarke Shayle had said, Catherine could not be "reached." He had promised Jack to help Dolores toward a safe future. He was glad of to-night's opportunity to learn what she wished that future to be.

But the girl no longer was restrained by his restraint. Now that she understood, she had no thought of herself except as it might concern him. Why consider the future in preference to the here and now? Why lower her eyes from that first sight of home and heaven?

The admiration and pity which she felt in her mind for him blended into a yearning desire to satisfy the demands spoken only in the glaze of his eyes, in the pallor of his face, in the stiff set of his lips.

"Maybe you would be comforted," she ventured, "to know how much I——"

Although he shrank farther back, his fingers, still pressed against her throat, conducted the tremor that passed through him.

"I'd give my soul to hear you say it. Surely you know that? Yet I must not hear—I dare not. Don't trust me. Don't try me."

"Does love try love?" Her eyes widened incredulously. "Isn't love a question, incomplete unless answered? You say that you care as I do—that you have cared all along. You would not tell me if it were not true. You ask me by loving me. Let me answer. You want to hear me! Don't you—*don't* you, John?"

She shook back the loosened hair from her face so that he might see while he heard the truth. She had thought him pale; now all colour left the lips pressed against his teeth. His hands tightened on her, but to hold her away. Before to-night she would have been silenced by this continence. But now that she knew—everything was different now.

"Don't repulse me as you did the dog, John. I deserve your pity more than he. Don't remind me that since birth my presence has brought death."

"Death, Dolores? I never guessed what life could be until I saw you."

"Why, then, make me feel that you regard me as a curse?"

"Dear, I am blessed to have known you."

Her appeal for herself softened him as those for himself could not do. In his palms he cupped the oval of her cheeks;

for long he looked into her eyes. Stiffly, as if compelled against their inclination by his will, his lips moved.

"So fragrant and pure is the soul of you, but fragile as the rose that Jack destroyed. You must not be wasted on me."

"But he said, John, that nothing is ever really wasted, not even the tears of dew on a rose. They have only their day—roses—and hearts have only their day. Why not enjoy them the more for their brief life? Tell me again, and read your answer in my happiness. Is it true—*true* that you love me?"

His eyes closed that he might not read; then opened at once lest he fail.

"I love you with a craving that terrifies me—only less, I hope, than my honour—with a will to protect you from what you do not understand—from myself and yourself——"

"Protect love against itself?" Her incredulity silenced him. "If my heart is a rose that you wish to pluck, John, take it, crush it, sift its petals through your fingers. If it brings you a moment's pleasure, it will not have been wasted."

His hands recoiled from her face as if from a danger.

But Dolores lifted her arms and laid them around his neck. She felt no false shame before him. She knew now.

"Take me, John, and crush me. Waste me, since you call love a waste. I am satisfied to be the rose of your day—to give off my fragrance for you."

He could not have shaken her off had he tried, so overwhelming was her wish to give him that for which he would not ask. He sat perfectly still, looking down into her eyes, listening to what she said. His breath came harder when she rose to her knees on the hassock and leaned against him.

"Jack told you to see that I was happy. I cannot be so while you are unhappy, John. Think of me and take me in your arms. Let me feel that I belong to you—that at last I *belong*."

"That first day I saw you, Dolores——" His white lips again moved in words. "Two visible creatures seemed to be born of our meeting. The best of me went out to you—my love. The best of you appealed to me—your innocence. Help me to see them plainly as on that day. Remind me of

your inexperience. Don't urge yourself upon me. For the sake of your innocence and my love, loose me and leave me."

But confusing sensations dulled the girl to his prayer—sensations of vehement rebellion, of incompleteness within sweet proximity of all, of a vast sadness and vaster joy. She shook with the shudder that shook him. Her hands drew his head to a resting place where the robe had fallen from her breast. She felt him relax in her arms; realized that his lips had touched, then drawn away from hers, as if offended by the contact.

"God help me . . . more than my honour."

She scarcely heard his words, so low were they rasped. The next moment he spoke plainly, although in a hoarse, hurried voice.

"Who do you suppose made the law that I am trying to obey? To be born with passions like mine, to hold them in leash all my life, because of the righteous hope my mother taught me of this moment and you, then to try to convince myself that it is all a lie for which I have lived—that love is less than law—— If God Almighty made it——"

"No, Man must have made that law," the girl interrupted. "Don't you feel, John, that love is right? I don't know God, but I know you. Can't you believe that way in me?"

"*Dolores!*" With worshipful reproach, he gave her the vow she asked. "With my mind, my heart, my body, I believe in you. I always shall believe."

Wonderingly he looked at her lips; saw on them for the first time a smile. Timidly yet bravely, it rewarded and further tempted him.

"Then kiss me. Love me!" she panted. "Oh, I want so to kiss you—to love you. I didn't know how much until——"

A strand of her hair fell across the smiling lips—across temptation. Although so tenuous and soft, it was a barrier between him and that from which he had pleaded to be saved. His hand shook from his hurry to brush it aside. The more greedily for its interference, his lips lowered to those lips that were tempting him; sank to them; found the complete answer they had sought in vain to speak.

Dolores' body was lifted into an embrace which would have been cruel, except for her desperate response. Her long hair drifted about them, a curtain from the light. Increasingly she felt that new sense of incompleteness, that weight of sadness and lightness of joy. Shaking from the violence aroused by her yearnings, she yet clung as if to gentleness.

"How strange I feel," she breathed.

"You are my mate, Dolores."

"I did not know—did not understand that love was like this."

Again he reassured her: "You are my mate."

"But is this what they felt for me, those other men? I hated them for it. I blamed them."

"No." He deprived her lips of his that his eyes might blaze the indignant denial into her eyes. "Their passion was lust. Yours is the fragrance of the rose—the pollen of your love. Do not fear that I could misunderstand."

"Fear? If God made the rose, why fear?" she half-sobbed. "If it is not lust for you to love me, give me back your lips. Oh, kiss me, John. Oh, love me. I *belong*."

CHAPTER XVII

"I CANNOT tell more to-night. I cannot make it snappy. I *cannot* go on."

The tortured protest of the spirit-girl Dolores was as the breath of a blower to her demon audience. It fanned the tinder of their evil imaginations and inflamed their desires for intimate details.

A clamour of profanity arose as the marble-pale, but fervid face which had wrought such grief among men lowered to the shield of hands that looked too weak to have torn to bits a strong man's honour. The shudder of crucified modesty caused the jewel-like lights that adorned her hair, her throat, her breast, to wink, as from carnal thoughts "indestructible" as their source of life.

For several nights the first Royal Entertainer had held her place at the monk-table's head by virtue of a twofold charm;

she had dazzled their eyes with her beauty and the illusion of her gorgeous apparel, while enslaving their attention with her tale. Now that she had reached what might be considered a spot of intensity, however, her sense of the artistic had failed her and them. She had fallen from the superiority of her infernal state ; and backslid, as it were, into the slough of an almost human self-consciousness. When their most venomous hisses did not lift the sin-dark head from the board, they turned as one to him who had arranged the entertainment. Interest of another kind stirred in them at the look of him.

Exasperation had lifted the King from his chair. He stood at the table's foot, glaring down at the proselyte who had dared to arouse, then deny his emotions. A glow surrounded him, outlining his superb proportions against the black velvet hangings. From his eyes—nearer green than grey at the moment—poured a baleful light. His features worked from mental lasciviousness.

" I told you to dispense with the asterisks," he reminded her. " How dare you tease me with this obsolete trick ? "

Dolores lifted her face. In the radium glow of his vicious expectations it gleamed with unthinkable chastity.

" I have not meant to tease or trick you," she said. " I have done my best to entertain—have plotted and planned my story like the writer of a book—have rehearsed my lines each day like an actress before her opening night. Every treasured phrase and word I have given you, just as learned by heart at the time and re-learned in my after-thoughts. I've tried—*tried*. But I find that I cannot go on. No true woman-soul could. What happened was between ourselves and——"

" Watch your words ! For the infidel you boast yourself, you're too free with the name of a certain Potentate. Besides, aren't you flattering the Great-I-Am ? I miss my guess if what happened wasn't between yourselves and me."

Dolores' timidity left her at the suggestion.

" I am sure Your Lowness had nothing to do with—with that night. Otherwise it would not seem so wrong to tell it here—such an injustice to John. The fault was not his. It was mine—all mine. I did what he implored me not to do.

I urged myself upon him beyond his strength. The only excuse for me is that, for all I had known of mortal man, I really did not understand. And he—he had felt so safe in his sorrow."

Half-rising, she clutched the table for support and gazed along the double file of spectral faces. The leer on the lips of him nicknamed Old Original aroused her to further defence.

"Perhaps our mateship was not meant to be gainsaid. Perhaps the races of the mortal world would be worthier their fair lands if right were not made wrong by mortal laws—if only the Maker whom John questioned need be obeyed. Perhaps He meant that the crave to be satisfied of all true love should compensate for His inexorable law that man must die."

At the shriek of derision that greeted her thought, she lifted her head and eyes in a transport of humble defiance.

"Whatever the perhaps and perhaps, I do not regret. The proof of what I felt for John I shall never regret. If I did wrong, it was in caring for him, and that I could not help. Love's first and best impulse is to bestow. I knew that I belonged to him and I wanted him to know. I am glad—*glad* that I told him. The way I gave the knowledge was called a crime—the only crime on earth not judged by motive and circumstance. Surely on that Day when justice becomes absolute, I shall not be blamed. What is a whispered confession, a lingering kiss, an abandoned embrace, to be quibbled over by Him who is said to have made us and all that we are from the impulse of love divine? Did not He Himself decree that love must be served?"

"She-fiend, you overstep yourself!"

The lash of His Majesty's voice convinced the girl-soul. Whipped by it back into her chair, she awaited the chastisement which would probably follow her regardlessness of rules. Thoughts of the Wantons' Well and the Ward for Bastard Babes subdued her small access of courage in the dread which had come with her from Earth to Shadow Land. She closed her eyes; ceased to breathe; expected. The pause seemed long; was long.

When finally the Rex of Reversals spoke, his humorous tone and diction made her realize that until then she had expected clemency.

"Hard to beat, this faith of fools! At least, the Great Judge of whom you hope a reprieve from the fiat of your world hasn't any corner on tolerance. Although love is a puny motive, I excuse a lot of it for sake of the passion it begets. Young woman, your story interests me. Since so large an audience has disconcerted you, suppose you finish it to sympathetic me alone. It is hate divine that must be served, and you who must serve it."

Dolores' moan went unheard in the instant protest of the demon cabinet. But their controller did not trouble to repeat his order. Not so much as a gesture or nod of dismissal did he vouchsafe, as they, not daring to vent their spleen over being excluded from this culminating séance, filed out one by one.

Although several times before Dolores had been alone with His Highness, she had never feared as now the Evil Mind. Her face returned to her palms. In darting speculations over what he next might say or do, she awaited his displeasure. Unendurably the silence lasted. She at last glanced up from morbid curiosity.

He was not looking at her. The green glow, so weird from his grey eyes, shafted well to one side and past her. She noticed that he was at once unusually attractive because unusually repulsive to-night. The concentration into which he had sunk drew out of her like a magnet a certain sympathy for the very evil he would do her. She shuddered in ghoulish anticipation.

More slowly lagged the seconds. More unnatural it seemed that still he did not look at her. Had there remained in his mind a shadow of Old Sam's suggestion that he had a weakness for her? Doubt of what might lurk in his averted eyes obsessed her.

"Why don't you speak? Why don't you look at me?" she urged aloud. "Please look at me."

She would better have remained in doubt. To see what

was in his eyes, to try to grasp the odious meaning of the glance now fixed upon her——

As she swayed backward in her chair, he proceeded to enlighten her.

"I get it."

"*It*, Your Majesty?"

"It—you—the secret power that has made you the desire of men and devils. Who would have thought to look at you that it was only a case of lust beget lust?"

"Oh, don't say that!"

He leered. "Why a pretence of apology between two bad ones like us? Instead of protesting virtues of which you ought to be ashamed, realize that your guilt as charged makes your desirability one-hundred-per-cent-plus down here, as it did on Earth."

Evidently not interested in her agreement, he turned away and began to pace the floor.

"This has been a red-letter night to me. Do you know, you're not telling a good story—not good at all. It has elements that quite hold me. We've had the vamp in books, over the footlights, and on the screen. I thought I knew the types and methods forward and backward—especially back. But your delineation of a young girl who is without design, because herself unconscious of the prurience in her, who appeals to the best in men by her guilelessness and the worst by her sleeping desire, who, although intending well, spreads disaster in her wake—— No matter what its claims to truth, sweet Grief, it makes a damned bad story."

He stopped directly before her in time to hear a murmured appeal to her guardian companions.

"Innocentia, must I believe these dreadful things about myself? If they are not true, help me to prove them false, dear, *dear* Amor."

Approvingly the Satanic chuckle sounded. "Consistent to fanaticism in your part! As you like. But let's get to the end. Forget the asterisks. Pull up the curtain. Give us the expurgated lines."

"If I am fanatic in my desire to be decent, you are an atheist. I tell you I cannot—will not go on!" From strength

of her abhorrence the spirit-girl started up and faced him. "Punish me as you like. Anything is better than to strip my soul to your unholy gaze."

"*Anything?*" He seized her arm with the sear of a red-hot iron. "I'll give you one second to fête your fancy upon what your punishment might be. You'll pay in full, you helliot, if you cheat me of an experiment that I plan to make. You've given me an idea more seducing than any of my own inception. If it works out, it will net you more than it will me. Come a day, you being what you are and I what I am——"

"I wish to hear no new ideas for me. I cannot endure more to-night."

At her sustained effort to combat his will, he leaned so closely over her that her face felt scorched from his mental insistence, more offensive than the physical insistence of any man of Earth. She struggled toward her chair; and there fell face forward on the board. He—without looking, she saw—swept after her like some ravening bird of prey. Strong, long talons clutched her. Almost had they shaken her access of strength from her when——

"Better let up on her, Your Demnition Pow-Wows."

A carping voice offered the advice. A tall, strong-looking ghoul swaggered into the light from the comparative darkness outside the door.

"Sin, you infernal eavesdropper, how dare you——"

"Leaves-dropper, rather—table-leaves-dropper." With incredible bravado Old Original winked into the Balial glare. "May I assume the compliment to my invisibility that you failed to notice me humbly awaiting Your Damnity's convenience without?"

"Impudently awaiting My Damnity's inconvenience, you mean. You may *not*. That I didn't notice you was due to the super-visibility of our royal *raconteuse*."

"Who will recount no more if you continue to torture her. Having recommended her to your inclemency in the first place, I feel more than less responsible. The wages of sin are best paid by death—you'll concede that to me, Excellency? Yet you do not, I am sure, wish her to die."

"Low-brow, she cannot die."

The old hoax returned a confident leer. "That I grow more high-brow with every age, let me demonstrate through a reminder of how the greatest roughness is the gentlest. What diverts you in her—her very virile hope—may die before that Day. Am I right or wrong in saying that you owe me, if not her, some consideration?"

"Wrong you are. You did throw me the acorn from which a giant oak may grow."

"And hasn't she sirened you along bad and improper? Hasn't she been square with you?"

"Yes, she's been square. There wasn't a right angle to all the past Delilahs ever damned by man or me."

Sin, with a wary eye fixed upon the Master of Malice, made for that end of the monk-board nearer the exit. The while he further ventured: "It isn't necessarily lowering to Your Highness to say that you have more to learn than I anent the siren act. You can't bully a dame into doting on you. The present-day caveman style is 40 h.p.—*after* you've got her. Before, a wise one coaxes her. And it isn't enough to load her down with that stage jewellery of which you're so prodigal, when you yourself don't look to be, any more than you act to be, of her day and degeneration. Why not tog yourself up more in the likeness of this millionaire love-hound of hers? Summer-time's coming apace or I'm no weather prophet, so why not moth-ball the well-known Vandyke and those robes of the vintage of Sol-in-all-his-glory days?"

A snarl of stabbed vanity greeted the daring suggestion. Its cogency was demonstrated, however, when, in a lunge after the purveyor of unsolicited counsel, the King tripped over his train.

From the hall the minister primed his advices.

"As for your technique, soft-pedal yourself. Don't keep blaring like a brass band at a lady who has fainted from fear of your noise."

The slam of the door was the old impertinent's period.

Once more tormentor and tormented were alone. Slowly the Past-Master of Policy righted himself and his intent. Returning to the prostrate girl-shade, he regarded her think-

ingly. Her side face lay lax upon the board, exquisite as an irradiated cameo in its twisted setting of hair. Closed were those eyes of the purples of the bougainvillae. Not a breath lifted the luring lines of the back revealed by her *décolleté*. Could her spirit really have swooned beyond his reach ?

He shrugged away the thought. Too often and too vehemently had he himself longed for surcease from consciousness in the last ten thousand years or so. Too well he knew that she still could hear him. Through time which had no beginning and could not end, she as well as he must continue to think—and think—and think.

Thinking of her now as he looked, he felt more than before attracted toward that new idea regarding her which had been inspired by the latest chapter of her earth history. The oldest Original was right. His ways with women were as archaic as his clothes, in the sight of this most modern of Magdalenes. No repression of his ruthlessness or change in his " style " would be too great a price to pay for success in that experiment.

When he spoke it was in mild tones.

" Forgive my stupidity. ' It isn't inherited—it's a gift.' All right, fairest fiend. We'll call it a séance to-night. Or better, suppose I give you a lift over the scene which has overwhelmed you with self-consciousness. At that, it may affect me worse to tell it myself. They say that the narrator gets more out of his story than his hearers. He must first feel in order to arouse feeling. A good bad idea. So then, *I'll* tell *you*."

The tips of his fingers crackled as he touched them to his lips, then waved them toward the unresponsive audience.

" Behind the Asterisks ! " he announced his subject. " The Great-I-Am invented the sex-impulse in order to give life to love. Necessarily He had to make it a strong emotion in order to people His earth.

" I invented loveless lust to people Hell. None born of the flesh dares deny his vulnerability. None but feels its basic attraction, even at times when most repulsed. Not to its cruder phases do I invite your attention—to the repro-

ductive instinct of the mortal male. That is ever awake, unashamed, engaging chiefly through its strength.

"But sleeping passion! To few are given the dear delight of arousing it. To breathe open the eyes searching through their mist of dreams—to kiss into consciousness the sweet-thick lips—to feel one's sluggish pulse speeding to match the beat of youth's startled heart——

"Ah, what man-brute of Earth, what god of Heaven or fiend of Hell would not gladly give the wealth of three worlds to incite the divine awakening!

"Moved beyond modesty, the arms uplift and cling—weak-strong arms, made supple to curve around the bodies of babes. The lips soon learn why they are so thick and honey-sweet, soon learn to give and to ask back in double dole.

"The inarticulate murmur of yearnings that crave utterance, but are ashamed of words . . . the sobs of utter innocence . . . the tender form that seems to shrink even as it seeks. . . . At last the naked desire . . . its brief, breathless struggle to control . . . the delirium of yielding to its will. . . .

"The hoping fear. . . .

"The fearing hope. . . ."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE works of the old Cabot clock were worn out. During the days and nights that followed its last tick, Dolores often glanced up into its non-committal face, reproachful that it would no longer mark off the minutes. Time dragged, weighted by her doubt over the state of mind of John.

Then, one night after twelve, when all the household was asleep, he came back to her. He folded her against his heart. He took her lips. He claimed her with full acknowledgment of his dependency.

"God forgive me," he said. "It is too much for me."

There was no need for him to explain. His white face, the pound of his heart against hers, his inconsistent pleas for pardon that he might be free to sin again, all helped her to understand. He was possessed by the passion of an all-demanding love. He had fought a fight; had fought and had failed.

Dolores could not lament his defeat. Only one thing mattered, that John's love answered hers. She had called and he had heard. Against his will he had come. Their acknowledgment, then, had not been a regrettable impulse; it had been, rather, what was to be. They loved, and Heaven was in their hearts. They *loved.*

After the days of doubt, Dolores rested in blessed conviction. Never before had she been given a chance at happiness. Here was her chance. Suggestions of smiles formed about her lips. A new light, like the gleam from deep-cut amethysts, shone from her eyes. A man like John Cabot did not love lightly. And John Cabot loved her.

Next morning she awoke with the wish that her father might know how well all was with her. Although a drizzling rain began to fall, she decided against ordering Jack's car. She preferred to go to Trevor Trent simply, as they had lived, changed only by the glory from within. She felt close to him while donning, for the first time in weeks, the old blue serge suit whose purchase price he had spared from the poppy paste. The long ride up town in the Subway, the mudded walk and the plain slab that marked the spot where she had left him to lie beneath down-drifting leaves, brought her nearer.

Where is there comfort like confiding a rapturous secret to one's own? How long the orphaned girl sat beside the grave, oblivious of the rain because her consciousness had gone to find and gladden that of the parent whose last "please God" had been that she should find a good love—how drenched was the blue suit—how chilled her feet—she subtracted none of her attention from him to realize. The adventure brought her content.

Some time during the afternoon she returned to the great house on the upper Avenue. So dulled she felt to outer perceptions that surprise held her only a moment to meet the

Frenchwoman, Annette, in the lift. She forgot to listen to the maid's explanation of why she had not remained with madame. Later she was forced to hear Morrison's insistence that she needed a doctor, but made light of the good woman's anxiety. What mattered a slight fever or swollen tonsils or a disinclination toward food to one blessed as was she?

As developed, however, these symptoms mattered much in the heightening of her happiness. The housekeeper's responsibility, transferred to Bradish, resulted in a telephoned message to Mr. Cabot's club. Soon after the wire, he came, terrified out of all proportion to her trifling symptoms. To see that all his instructions were carried out, he stayed.

Dolores' protestations soon ceased, since to relieve his anxiety might take him away again. It was too precious to forego, this experience of being ministered to by him. Their first meal alone together, which he ordered served in Jack's living-room much as the youngster himself might have done, was an occasion almost too significant for calm. To please him, she tried to sip her broth and eat her toast, but with the sacred joy of a convert at some sacrament.

After he had shut out the servants and advised Morrison that he would sit awhile with Miss Trent, he wrapped her first in a robe, then in his arms, and sat rocking her with a possessive tenderness which made her realize how much she had missed from her babyhood. Her ecstasy of content must have dulled her ears. She heard no sound, merely assumed one, when he placed her in Jack's reading chair, took a few steps towards the hall door—and stood intently listening. Still she had heard nothing when he strode to the door and flung it wide.

Upon the threshold, in a panic of indecision between flight and remaining, stood Annette. Her eyes, nondescript except for their shrewdness, followed the thinking glance of the man who had surprised her, from the half-light of the corridor to the strong one of the reading-lamp within, then down to the keyhole, minus its key. Evidently she decided on bravado. A sneer drew down the corners of her mouth. She straightened to face the master.

"You back?" he asked.

"Madame finds herself in need of certain dinner gowns. She returned me to select and pack them."

"She sent you back from Florida to select and pack certain gowns? How much does madame pay you for the job?"

"Does not Mr. Cabot know the amount of my salary, none too large for one who has served——"

"I mean how much for this keyhole job?"

At his contemptuous interruption, the woman caught her breath.

"Five-hundred-dollar, m'sieu."

"A five-hundred-dollar bonus? Madame is good to you. However, I am in a position to do better. I'll advance that bonus to-night, if you'll leave her employ."

Her avaricious watch of his face eased in a disappointed laugh. "Does m'sieu think I would turn the traitor to a mistress who has ever been most generous, and who trusts——"

"I do."

"And for a wretched five hundred, already earned?"

"I do not—not for five hundred." He contributed a short laugh. "But for that in cash, plus a cheque for one thousand, good in six months if you neglect to report to this trusting mistress who has been so generous with you."

"But how can M'sieu Cabot think so low of me that for a paltry thousand-dollar——"

"The five hundred you get now," he detailed. "The cheque for a thousand will be dated so that you can cash it in June, unless traitoring has become a habit with you. If that is so, I shall stop payment at the bank. You will leave this house and Mrs. Cabot's employ at once. Satisfactory?"

The click of the last-word question must have satisfied the maid that she could profit no further.

"Quite," she replied, succinctly as he.

Without comment on the fact that he had read her aright, John Cabot counted five century notes from his wallet and drew the promised cheque, calling her attention to the date, six months from that day.

When she had gone he said to Dolores:

"I want my freedom, but not at your expense."

"You really think," the girl faltered, "that that is why Annette is here?"

He nodded. "Also why you are here, and why I should not be. I have been inexcusable. *I* am the traitor—the waster of what I valued most."

"Don't keep saying that," she protested. "Nothing can be wasted when we love. Jack lived and died that we might know."

Through the gloom of self-reproach which was settling over him—settling between them—he saw her outstretched hands; caught them; was reminded of her feverish state.

"Dear, it will come right," he made effort to assure her and, with her, himself. "We mustn't allow anything to be wasted, not a moment of our time together, not a regret for the innocence which I should have died rather than——"

Her smile stopped him—the shy, tremulous, revealing smile so lately learned. Had a dew-wet violet along a woodland path looked up at him, he could not have trod upon it. He must not tread upon that smile.

He returned to his delightful care of her. His first and most important obligation was to see that she did not become ill, he told her. She must rest now; must sleep off her temperature. He rang for Mrs. Morrison; agreed that their charge might be put to bed in Jack's four-poster; himself suggested that the Airedale be allowed upstairs to snuggle at her feet. When the housekeeper had finished her motherly offices, he made her no explanation of why he still sat reading in the outer room.

Not since the slight ailments to which all children are heir had Dolores been ill. Shivering into the eider-down of the historic bed, she felt vaguely wretched, uncertain, lost. From the same impulse which had asked the reward of a good-night kiss from Morrison for her tractability, she now asked John:

"You won't go away?"

"Leave the corridor door ajar, Morrison." As if from afar she heard his instructions. "Come up again when it is time for her medicine. And, Morrison, I have discharged

Mrs. Cabot's maid. She is to leave as soon as she can pack her things."

Dolores grew warmer, then uncomfortably warm. She must soon have fallen into a doze. When she opened her eyes, she saw that the night lamp had been clicked off and the light from the living-room shaded from her face by a screen. The four, tall, pineapple sentinels guarded her—they and some one else.

John sat beside the bed, the puppy drowsing in his arms. She was glad that he had become reconciled to the poor little beast, that the guiltless cause of Jack's death was not to pay the price which she had paid in early life for an equally unintentional fault.

But *was* John reconciled ?

The look on his face brought her to acute consciousness. It was a dreadful look.

" Try not to begrudge the price," she murmured. " For the least thing in life you have to pay, you know. To me, love is inestimable."

At the sound of her voice, the young dog lifted one of his scraggly eyelids, and, without otherwise moving, thumped his stub of a tail. John's expression changed. He leaned toward her.

" I shouldn't regret any price that I myself could pay. But I am not satisfied to let you, who can't afford it, pay for me. And I won't."

She did not understand just what he meant. " You talk as though you were guilty of——"

He caught her hand and pressed his cheek against it.

" Guilty as—Heaven ! " he whispered into its palm, before replacing it beneath the coverlet. At her disturbed look he added : " I am tired with anxiety for you. Won't you sleep, in order to rest me ? Don't be afraid that I am going to leave you. I can stay on this watch of love for ever, if only you will sleep."

" John—John ? " Vaguely she questioned him.

" You are my mate," he answered. " Rufus called you a grey dove, but to me you are pure white. Fold your wings and sleep."

"But are you happy, John?"

"Happy as——"

Her eyelids closed at the touch of his lips. Happy as who? She wondered. Happy as Cain—that was the meaning of the dreadful look she had surprised. But she had banished that look. Since she must sleep that his mind might rest—— How wonderful was this state called happiness. How precious was each small opportunity to prove how very much——

"Fold your wings, my white dove," he murmured again and again. "Sleep, my mate. I love you. Sleep."

A hysterical yelp awakened her. Evidently the Airedale, too, had been startled from sound slumber. How long had she been asleep—for how many minutes or hours had John Cabot sat there motionless, his eyes on her face?

She raised herself on one elbow and looked into the outer room. The little undergraduate from the Kennel Club, more from hereditary instinct than any wisdom of his own months, had bolted from his bed of honour. One backward glare he spared to learn whether he was to be justified in raising the alarm; then, bristling from stiff chin whiskers to flagstaff tail, he rushed into the corridor. His master followed.

Dolores tried hard to understand. Her head felt strange and understanding hurt it. Many sentences of the colloquy outside were not clear at the time, but came back to her afterward. Besides the voice of John Cabot, she recognized the distressed *mezzo* of Morrison, the startled quaver of old Bradish, and an unrecognized duet in bass.

"We are all of that, Mr. Cabot—from the Domestic Detectives, Incorporated," sounded the first strange voice, evidently in answer to some question or comment from John.

"And just in time, at that"—the second.

"Has Annette gone yet, Morrison?"

Bradish answered John's question. "I let her out not ten minutes ago, sir."

"Did you see her speak to these men?"

"She did not pass near enough to speak to them, sir. But I think she signalled them with a gesture. I cannot be sure,"

One of the strangers interrupted. "You can't deny that Miss Trent is inside."

"I deny nothing, but I order you out of my house," John returned.

"Don t you owe it to yourself to explain, Mr. Cabot?" asked Mrs. Morrison. "I've worked in this family all my life and am considered a proper woman. The young lady you ask about is seriously ill. Mr. Cabot is here because my father, the butler, telephoned for him."

"Ill, is she?" said the first strange voice. "Well, we're specialists sent to investigate her symptoms. Here, matey, help me ease this gent away from the door. No need for strenuous argument when we're two to his one."

"Look out—a gun!" cried the second.

"And a gun," John added quietly, "trained to put burglars out of my house."

"We're not burglars, Mr. Cabot. We're authorized to enter by the lady of your house."

"By Mrs. Cabot? Her authorization can't help you—from the distance of Palm Beach."

Together the two laughed. One explained their amusement.

"Wifie isn't in Palm Beach, old chap. She's waiting down at the Plaza to give us any further authority we need over the telephone."

"She—didn't—go?" A moment of silence followed John's slow question; then, in staccato, he added:

"Well, get your further authority over an outside 'phone. Mine are busy. Quick, now—my fingers are nervous. I'd be well within my rights if I——"

A grumbled sentence which Dolores could not hear ended in steps descending the stairs. The colloquy seemed to be ended. She felt relieved; and dozed off.

The morning was half over before John inquired about her condition over Jack's telephone. He felt that he must tell her certain facts, not so much to worry her as to spare her worry over matters which undoubtedly would soon be forced upon her attention. He hoped that listening would not tax

her, since the physician's morning report had been most encouraging. A little patience, a few days within doors, and she would be herself again. His relief she could better imagine than he describe.

If his friend Rufus Holt called to see her, she was to talk to him as she felt inclined and might trust his advice. Toward any other inquiries regarding her personal affairs she should not commit herself. For some time he would not be able to see her, and he considered it best that he should get his news of her through Morrison. She must take all possible care of herself and believe that nothing—*nothing* had been wasted.

Scarcely had Dolores hung up the receiver, scarcely had she given her mind to the realization that John Cabot was trying to protect her from whatever it was that threatened, when the landing door opened and Clarke Shayle strode into the room.

He looked flushed, hurried, perturbed. He stopped before Jack's reading chair, in which she sat, and fixed his odd-flecked gaze upon her, his lips twitching. Sinking on the hassock, he laid his face in the robe that wrapped her knees and drew a rasping, relieved sigh.

"I was a fool to credit a word of it," he exclaimed brokenly. "You really are ill. You really are—everything I believed. I don't care what she says or what anybody says. I wouldn't care even if they could prove it. What a man thinks himself is the only thing that matters. And I've got a sort of super-think." His attempt to banish emotion from his face with a grin was more ghastly than gay. "You see, it isn't inherited. It's a gift."

Even in this crisis, he could not express himself without the use of his banal phrases. Dolores felt sorry for him. She stretched out her hand from an impulse to smooth back his stiff, auburn cowlick; then, remembering, she drew it back.

"What 'she,' and what 'anybody'?" she asked.

"She sent for me this morning and told me all about last night. I believe she had the whole thing planned from first sight of you. She's the only wholly bad woman I've ever known—Catherine." He shaded his eyes as if confused by

her shocked glance, then continued: "She loves herself and hates every one who does not share the feeling, chiefly her husband. Because he has humiliated her by getting her number right, she intends to humiliate him before their world. She's going to marry d'Elie after she gets all she wants out of Cabot and gets it her own way. As for me——"

His face lowered into his freckled, delicate hands. A shudder moved his thick neck and muscular back.

"God knows, I deserve the part she's cast me for. But I pray Him—I pray you to let me off. My self-respect was only doped. It came to on the day I met you and has made me so unhappy since that I—I hope—— Oh, have a heart, little chump! Help me to be honest with you—encourage me to explain."

"Why not?" She hesitated.

"Because I owe it to you to make you understand. Because you have made me despise myself and my life. Here in your presence, at the present moment, I'd rather die than go on. Yet, I'll worse than die if I don't go on. Dolores, you have felt something of my power—you know that I'm mesmeric and hypnotic. You know that I know it, but not that I have used it to make me what I am to-day." He gave a limping laugh. "Can't you imagine what is my professional stock-in-trade—how I hold Catherine and her sort in scented boudoirs?"

"No—*no*." With her low protest, the girl drew back into her chair; clutched its arms; closed her eyes, as if against the perception.

From his abject position at her feet, the young man straightened and clasped together his hands so viciously that nails cut into flesh. The white spots pressed by his teeth into his lower lip spread backward until even his ears were pale.

"That's the worst of it," he said effortfully. "The best is that I could have roused you, could rouse you now. But I won't. I know the tinder you are made of. That first day I realized that my self-respect was only auto-hypnotized, not dead. The feeling for you that restrained me has grown—has given me the strength to tell you the truth and to ask your help."

" But if you despise yourself and your life," Dolores faltered, " why not help yourself ? "

" Don't you know that a bad habit soon masters one ? The damnable thing has got me, that's why. It will take something stronger than contempt for myself to get me out. That something is my respect for you. The fact that I didn't—that I simply couldn't——" His fingers forward-stretching, but clutching only air, his face again florid from a return rush of blood, he urged : " You—I need *you*. God, I am mad for you. Have been all along ! But I want you to keep. I want you enough to change my whole life to have you. I know I am a crude sort—that I'm not what they call to the manner born. But I swear to give you a square deal. I don't care what they say about you. I believe in you. I want to marry you—to take you off somewhere, so that you and I—— Surely you love me, Dolores ? Surely you will——"

The pause was long. During it he seized her limp hand, then dropped it. He staggered to his feet and stood looking down at her with the dread gaze of despair. When he spoke again, his lips worked clumsily.

" So, I'm too late. You're a snuffed candle to me. That means—Mr. Other Man. The reward of my sacrifice is—punishment. It's a beautiful sentiment. I'll tell the world that. She was speaking the truth for once, then, about you and John Cabot ? All right, I quit ; I'm through."

Dolores watched him fling into his overcoat, pick up his hat and start for the door. She wished to say something that would help him. She owed him consideration, as the only man who had asked her to marry him. That he had asked her soothed an ache in her mind. She liked him and she feared for him. But what was there she could say ?

Without a word she had refused him. Without a word she let him go.

The American vernacular " breezed in " might have been inspired by the entries of Rufus Holt. Less boisterous than a gale, stronger than a zephyr, something refreshing and promising came with him, like the tonic in the breath of Spring.

" Glad you're enjoying a rest," he saluted Dolores. " You need it, probably, as much as you deserve it. Or perhaps I

should say you deserve it as much as you need it. It is a worthy thought, for it works both ways."

The girl, having been advised to trust the attorney, relaxed in his balmy friendliness.

"Doesn't the truth usually work both ways?"

At her offering he rubbed his bald fore-top. "I don't know about that. We lawyers learn not to expect too much of the truth. It has gone some if it works one way."

The fact that he would not take off his top-coat gave each minute of the time that he did stay an added value. That he would not smoke somehow increased the fragrance about him of a fine cigar. That he gave her choice of chairs for him the preference lent companionableness to his manner of pulling up directly before her.

"The future has in it lots and lots of trouble that hasn't been used yet," he prefaced, suddenly grave, "but don't think that you, lovely little lady, are going to get all of it. There are other non-union workers besides yourself."

"Others?"

He evaded the direct question.

Trouble was the text of his small address—trouble ahead of a kind she had not known. She must prepare her mind for it; must gather her resources against an attack. Another would be protected in the protectorate of herself, one who deserved justification quite as much as she.

Meeting the silent, fluent appeal of her eyes, he set aside hyperbole, placing facts before her, as if on the salver of his outspread hands.

Catherine Cabot was an edition of womankind which Dolores doubtless had found hard to read. Velvet-bound was she, gilt-edged, artfully illustrated. The most astute of worldlings might remain unenlightened for many chapters as to the plot of her. Spite, it would seem, was her motivation—spite toward a husband who had depreciated what she was by a deliberate and stubborn over-valuation.

Long she had waited and watched to prove the plot of him as bad as her own. Quite recently she had refused a separation because she wished, not only a divorce, but a discredited husband and a huge, decreed alimony, rather than a collusive settle-

ment. Her engagement of Dolores, her pseudo-kindnesses, her pretended dependence upon the girl in her recent trip South —a trip that had taken her no farther than Philadelphia, followed by a secret return to a mid-town hotel—were calculated steps toward this end. To-day she had served upon her husband the complaint in a suit for absolute divorce. Dolores Trent, grief now to one woman as to many men, she had named as co-respondent.

The dread announcement was made.

Forgetting the hurry on account of which he had refused to smoke, Holt now busied himself producing a cigar, clipping it and lighting it. Through smoke-clouds he looked across at the notorious girl whom he had whip-lashed with news of fresh notoriety. Seeing that her lips moved, he leaned forward to catch her words.

"Maybe she was not so bad as—the idea was d'Elie's. I mustn't forget that. *He* suggested that the father of *l'enfant terrible* might find me congenial—not she. 'Enough, my clever Henri. I understand.' I remember distinctly what she said."

In the midst of her shared memories, she became conscious of the quality of the lawyer's regard. Her eyes lifted to his.

"You believe that I——"

Perhaps the more staunchly for catching the sag in her voice, he sought to reassure her.

"I *know* that you are guiltless. Do you recall the toast I gave you one night at dinner? I didn't say on that occasion that I'd been doubly favoured by meeting your kind of woman twice in my lifetime—the woman who doesn't need to boast or sparkle or promise—the woman who needs only to be. The first one, Miss Trent, of whom you reminded me, was my mother."

Dolores was startled. Always before she had suffered because unjustly blamed. Now she was unjustly praised. She did not feel honest. But she must be careful, even with the kindly attorney. She had John, as well as herself, to think of. The fault was not so much his as hers, and he must not be blamed.

"Then, too"—Holt had cleared the huskiness from his throat—"I know John Cabot."

Evidently that, to him, was conclusive.

By and by he added: "Even Mrs. Cabot does not think you guilty, as she charges."

"How can you know that?" Again Dolores was startled.

"She admitted as much to me not more than an hour ago."

"You have talked with her to-day and she admitted—— Then, perhaps, she *can* be reached?"

But the bald head wagged, even as the friendly eyes beamed upon her. "She cannot be reached as you mean, although I have reached her in a way for which you may despise me. Mrs. Cabot has retained me as her lawyer in this case."

"You—her lawyer?" The words were so hot that they seemed to scorch Dolores' lips. "I thought you were his friend?"

"I am. But Catherine believes now that I have always cared—for her, you know—and that therefore I want her freedom more than anything else in the world. A vain woman can easily be persuaded."

Dolores could not understand. "You say that you really are his friend, yet you take Mrs. Cabot's case against him? What possible motive——"

"I am taking the case in order to lose it."

CHAPTER XIX

BEFORE the divorce suit of Cabot *v.* Cabot came to trial, reassurance on several of its vital points reached Dolores through the consideration of Rufus Holt. To the greatest possible extent details were to be denied the scandal-hungry public. John Cabot would offer his defence through eminent counsel, as a case unworthy his personal appearance. She herself, the co-respondent so necessary to the severance of marital ties if one lives and sues in the commonwealth, was to remain for the present with Mrs. Morrison, reported as too ill to undertake the vindication of her name. Roscoe Strang, the judge

who was to pass judgment upon the Cabot difference, was a friend of Holt's, indebted to him for many favours, political and otherwise. The attorney had seen to that. Soon everything would be settled, as Mrs. Cabot's case would be advanced on the calendar on her plea that she wished to have the painful affair over as soon as possible, that she might hasten abroad to undertake certain war-orphan charities to which she had pledged herself in loving memory of her little son.

Despite all these assurances, the girl awaited with keen anxiety a call to a special conference with the plaintiff's lawyer, for which she had been told to hold herself in readiness immediately after the public hearing. Summoned one mid-February afternoon by special messenger, she taxied according to instructions to a down-town "square," not far from the City Hall Park that housed the courts of alleged justice.

One glance at Rufus Holt through the folds of the veil she had been asked to wear convinced her that this, indeed, was his first detour from straight legal paths. Although he smiled in at her from the opened cab door, much of the cheer and most of the youth was gone from his face. After giving a low-voiced address to the driver, he seated himself beside her and forced a return to his wonted sanguineness.

No need for Dolores to ask in words whether the ordeal was over—whether John Cabot had been vindicated of the charge. The moment their machine was under way, her eyes put the demand.

"Judge Strang reserved his decision. But they always do that, as I explained a short while since to my client," answered Holt. "You and I are going now to meet a friend of mine—just that, a friend of mine. In the course of a day or so, the case will be decided—against me."

Under all the circumstances, his sigh was justifiable. Dolores was beginning to realize that. The change in his face alone told her the enormity of his sacrifice in laying professional honour upon the altar of a man-to-man friendship. As the taxi wound its way up town, he gave her an idea of the proceedings.

The beautiful Mrs. Cabot, an appealing picture in her sables and crêpe, had been, of course, her own chief witness. She had

told of her determination to believe in her husband and the girl whom she had sheltered from storm-blasts, which had seemed driving her to an unthinkable fate. She had been slow —too slow—to admit that any form so young and fair could house such veteran vices.

In broken sentences, as if warding off an emotional breakdown, she had outlined the hold which the governess had won upon her own heart through the heart of her only child. Not until after the boy's death had she brought herself to consider the suggestions of servants and friends that all was not well within her household. When the doctors had prescribed a change of climate for her, she had pretended to go South, but with the idea of returning at once in order to determine the truth for herself. Her maid, a French woman in whom she had felt all confidence, she had sent on an errand back to the house to learn late developments. While Annette was still within, her detectives had followed her husband there. This maid evidently had been over-bribed, for, after signalling the detectives that the moment was propitious to enter, she had disappeared. That fact was stronger than any report could have been as evidence against Mr. Cabot.

All that she felt she needed to add to the testimony of the detectives was the name of the Circe who had destroyed the good-faith of her home. Would New York be surprised to hear this new chapter in the unparalleled career of one already known as "Grief to Men"?

"You let her name me in open court?" Dolores covered her veiled face with her hands.

"What did it matter, when you had been named in the legal papers?" the attorney reminded her. "I was able, however, to check her further attempts to pay her respects to you by insisting that she need not distress herself."

"And the—the defence?"

"John had no defence that could be made in such a proceeding. His attorney's declaration that Mr. Cabot had nothing which he cared to offer in the way of testimony, may have convinced the crowd that you were being used, either with or without your consent, to lift his yoke, but it clearly puzzled the judge. Before we reach our destination, Miss Trent, I

want to express something of the high esteem in which I hold you. Oh, don't draw back—don't look so frightened! This is no declaration in the ordinary sense."

Removing his hat, he rubbed his egg-white forehead as though it were a vocabulary from which words might be extracted by friction.

"Never have I been in the plight called 'love'—never expect to be," he continued. "In any case, never shall I marry—maybe because I thought so much of that mother o' mine—maybe because I think so little of marriage. Can you see humour in the statement that women, while my professional speciality, are not at all in my line personally? That fact may help you to appreciate what I want to say to you."

He turned toward her with the combination of wistfulness and whimsicality in his smile which first had attracted and then animated the lonely girl.

"Miss Trent," said he, "I think you are the truest woman I have ever met. I am obsessed by the thought of you. Oh, not you, really; rather the idea you represent—the idea of absolute truth. A woman like you should not fear the opinion of anyone. Will you remember that—say, when lifting your eyes to those of the very next person you meet?"

Dolores assured him that she would. At the same time, in her thoughts, she assured herself. Just as the primary instinct common to all animal life is the right to live, the second instinct common to women is the right to love. She was not ashamed of her love when facing that inner tribunal called Truth. Why, indeed, should she fear the opinion of any man? Rufus Holt, despite the conventional limitations of his "ideas" of her, was right. She would not, *could* not feel ashamed.

To a place no more official than the bachelor apartments of Justice Roscoe Strang did Rufus Holt dare take the girl who was not his client. When a Japanese man-servant had ushered them into the somewhat sombre ante-room, he passed on into a library, but left the door behind him ajar, evidently that she might overhear his conversation with his friend.

"You, Rufus?"

"Yes, Roscoe, and about that case I tried before you this morning—the Cabot divorce. I'm afraid that a wrong is being done."

A bass chortle sounded. "That's what modern marriage is—doing each other wrong."

"But this is a wrong gone wrong in that it does not strike right. I have the Cabot co-respondent outside. I want you to meet her."

"Not the Trent girl?" The scrape of a chair underscored a muttered oath. "You don't dare presume on our friendship to—to——"

"Not to commit a professional breach, no," interrupted Holt. "You ought to know me better than that. And don't call her 'the Trent girl.' No matter whose lawyer I am, I tell you that she does not deserve it."

"Then why didn't she take the stand? It always looks bad for a woman when she won't fight for her good name. And why wouldn't this great philanthropist friend of yours say a word for her, not to mention himself?"

"John Cabot is too big a man to be dragged into a court defence of the sort. Any man who hopes to meet his mother's questioning eyes in Paradise would hesitate to crucify this girl with any more vulgar notoriety. Roscoe, for once in my life, the man in me has convinced the lawyer. Now, as never before, I want the scales of the blind goddess to weigh *with justice.*"

"It would seem that one latter-day goddess must have been already weighed—and with justice—to have made such gooseberry jam out of your heart of flint. A face that can make *you* forget to be a lawyer first! I'd like to see——"

Before "the friend" whom Holt wished her to meet could retract or modify, Dolores was led into the larger room. She found that "the very next person" to whose eyes she would lift her own, was the judge of the case of Cabot *v.* Cabot. While she did not remember—not exactly—the compliment paid her in the cab, she met his shrewd gaze with her own defence. He looked for the truth. He saw it—that she felt no shame.

What they said did not matter—probably could not have

been recalled by any of the three. Their brief chat was significant only through the things they might not say.

In Justice Strang, Dolores saw a man who filled her with confidence. The determination to know the worst about himself and conquer it showed in the set of his jaw. His red necktie had action—even daring. His attire otherwise, like his manner, was conventional.

He escorted them into the hall and to the lift. Just before the door clicked shut upon them, he said so emphatically that the attendant turned and stared curiously at her:

"Young lady, you have the most eloquent personality I have ever met."

Thus it came about that the decision denying Catherine Cabot her divorce came to the Press as a thunder-clap two days later. The comment that resulted, Justice Strang met with interviews in which he put unanswerable questions. Who suffered most, the innocent or the guilty? To make the innocent suffer—was not that a culpable act? What had been proved? The wife's evidence was unavailable. The maid had disappeared. The detectives could testify to nothing that was proof of guilt. Why elect a judicial puppet? Of what use was a judge if not entitled to disregard everything except his own honest opinion?

Thus it transpired that Dolores Trent, having been convicted unjustly in the public mind of the several past offences ascribed to her, found herself vindicated of the one crime against Society of which she really was guilty, as charged.

Each morning a magnificent box from an Avenue florist was delivered to the interesting occupant of a small, furnished suite in an up-town apartment hotel. The regularity of the "attention" quipped the management's curiosity concerning "Miss Trevor." Usually such regardlessness was followed by a gentleman in a hired car, wearing a fur-lined overcoat and a manner at once suave and impatient. But no gentleman had shown interest in this lady since the apartment had been engaged and paid for by one whose coat was most unpretentious, and whose manner was neither suave nor impatient—a pleasant-spoken, bald-pated, breezy type of man,

who somehow did not seem the sort to be telling it daily " in flowers."

Dolores herself had to guess from whom they came, just as she assumed John Cabot's wish that she should let him fulfil his promise to Jack " to look after her " until such time as he thought wise to see her. Rufus Holt, who had found and advised the new location, had made no explanation. Even when he had closed her fingers round a roll of five one-hundred-dollar bills, he had left her to assumption.

But Dolores *knew*. And, knowing, she was in a way content. Alone—except for the Airedale puppy, who had greeted her more vociferously than the rest of her luggage—she relaxed in her sense of an all-protective love, and tried to live on the significance of deep-hearted pansies, American beauties and forget-me-nots.

At the end of the fourth week a receipt was tucked under her living-room door for the second month's rental in advance. That it was not for three months—or six—gave her a feeling of anticipation. A month at a time meant that a change might be expected before the third payment became due. With the expenditure of each dollar of her cash-in-hand this feeling increased. Five hundred dollars was a great deal of money. But even five hundred would be consumed in time by one healthy young woman and one fast-growing dog. An all-protective love must realize that. Perhaps by the time the five hundred was gone——

She had to fight her first impulses of extravagance. Her tendency was to tip unwisely and too well, to order a superfluity of the disguising veils she had taken to wearing on the long river-side tramps which were the anticipation of the Airedale's mornings and the reminiscences of his puppy dreams at night. Unable to decide what name for the dog Jack's old-young mind would have hit upon, she continued to call him " puppy " or " pups," as certain unimaginative people she had known were satisfied with " kittie " for their cat, or " baby " for their child.

Conscientiously allowing herself only legitimate expenditures, Dolores' gladness increased, as her roll of bills thinned, that it had not been a thousand, seven hundred, or even six. It

might so easily have been more. Towards the end of the second month she felt hopeful—almost sure—that the worst would soon be over. The very thought of it dizzied her with happiness. To see him again, if only for a moment or two——

But she had to be satisfied with hearing his voice. Rung suddenly from her sleep one night, she half believed his telephone call a dream, until the metallic sound of his uphung receiver told her that the opportunity was passed. Until morning she lay awake, fondling, one by one, his carefully covered sentences.

John had not intended to speak with her at present. But the wish had conquered him to-night to hear her assurance that she understood. He had been a criminal and must work out his sentence. Under a sacred obligation to protect her, he had injured her at each attempt, from the finale at the lingerie shop to her present exile. She had shown pity for his weakness before, and perhaps could forgive him now. He never could forgive himself.

He had been overcome in the moment of his greatest strength, when he had felt safe in his sorrow. Now, when weakest, he dared not tempt himself. His only chance of reinstating himself in his own opinion was to win the fight he had undertaken. Their loyal acquaintance would explain.

Meantime was she well and would she try to be contented until he could force a change? And would she believe?

That she did believe, steadied Dolores through the discouragement of another prepaid rent receipt. When the "change" came, it was not of John's enforcement. One afternoon Rufus Holt called on her. He came in on the breeze that wafted him through life. His smile was still cheery, his manner even more courteous than usual. Yet he was different. Considerately he attempted to "explain."

The late chapters of that gilt-bound edition of womanhood, Catherine Cabot, read like the cheapest of thrillers. Soon after re-establishing herself in her husbandless home, she had sent for Dr. Shayle. What had passed between her and the likeable young man whom she had "made" in a week was best judged by the fact that she unmade him in a day. In notes, over the telephone, and during such informal social functions as she

could make excuse to attend in her mourning, she ruined him professionally. To his rich patients she expressed her regrets that she could no longer sponsor him—that his conduct with one who had brought disgrace to so many had proved him an unfit person to have about the home in an intimate capacity. All of which reminded Holt that he had a letter for her.

The envelope which he tendered was addressed to and had been opened by John Cabot. Above the heading of a Chicago hotel was scrawled the osteopath's name. Inside was the request that Mr. Cabot would forward to Miss Trent the unsealed enclosure.

The note to Dolores read:

DEAR YOU,——

My chief regret is having distressed you. Don't be distressed about me any more. Already my hurt is healing, salved by the honour of having known you. I daren't forget you, because remembering you is the best thing in my life at the present moment. Have refused the last bribe of her who made me what I was—yesterday. Am on my way West, where I can start fair with doctor men who use their powers to help instead of hinder. The ambition, I find, is not a gift——it's inherited. You great little chump, there is only one hope in my heart—may you be happy.

DEAR ME.

So then, to one, at least, she had not been a lasting grief! Dolores felt very proud for herself and for Clarke Shayle. She turned to her caller with the impulse to confide her good news, but hesitated at the look of him. He had yielded to the Airedale's importunities and was scratching the stub ears. The eyes of the dog were rolling from realized bliss. Those of the implement of bliss were troubled. She could see that attorney Holt was planning what he had come to say.

"Miss Trent," he began, on noting that he again had her attention, "Mr. Cabot has been acting under my insistent advice in not coming to see you. I know that he wishes to come. My stand is based upon my high regard for him and, may I add, for you? He intends to accomplish a divorce from Mrs. Cabot as soon as possible, but on his own terms—terms primarily calculated to repudiate the slurs cast upon you. His ruling desire is to save your good name. I want to see him carry out this idea. Miss Trent, do you?"

"Why—why, yes," faltered the girl.

"I am glad to hear you say that, because—well, you and he, lovely little lady, know better than I just why. His position is at present extremely jeopardous. He is watched night and day by detectives."

"More detectives? But I thought——"

"I did, too. Mrs. Cabot, however, has not accepted Judge Strang's decision as final. She has postponed her trip abroad, and from Newport is directing an attack on his integrity and mine. Through influence and the manipulations of a brilliant shyster, she is trying to reopen the case in another court. Meanwhile, she is acting on the theory expressed in the old French proverb that 'love and smoke are unable to conceal themselves.'"

Evidently love, at least, was not. With his white, slim hand Holt shielded his eyes from sight of her face, and continued:

"More than before is the Cabot name threatened, your good name and mine. Unless we are discreet, she may have a case which might convince a judge less discerning than my friend Roscoe Strang, and let the Bar Association get its claws into me. If your whereabouts should be chanced upon, if the florist should be inspired to tell of the daily flowers paid for by the lawyer who *lost* Mrs. Cabot's first case, even if friend pup here should yap his identity abroad—— Do you see, Miss Trent, why my advice has been insistent?"

After a keen glance at her he continued: "But I fear that my advice is losing its punch. You see, I have an imagination. I know John Cabot and I have seen you. Perhaps I haven't made clear the absolute faith I feel in both of you. Wish I could put it beautifully with all the words and music. But we men weren't meant to be gods in strength, you know. Why, even I have a secret vice!"

He smiled across at her youthfully, and at her continued silence, added:

"I wriggle my toes."

But the girl did not smile back. She couldn't.

"What is it you wish me to do?" she asked.

"I wish you to put yourself beyond reach. John's weak

spot is you. He acknowledges it. He looks haggard and acts worse—is beginning to fear that he can't hold out. And, of course, with that fear in his heart, he won't. I wish you to remove his temptation—until matters are adjusted, not to let him know your whereabouts and under no circumstances to write to him. Even his mail may be watched—there can be traitors in any man's office—and nothing is so damning as written evidence."

"Oh, but I—he——"

"Poor child." Holt's interruption expressed ever so much of his pity. "Child first, then woman. You acknowledge that I am right, don't you? Then aren't you willing to help him? Only you can help him now. John is not a man to talk, as you know, but he knows that I am his friend. 'I have just strength enough to stay away,' he told me. 'I'm afraid that if I saw her, if she called me by so much as a look ——' You see, Miss Trent, the state to which the long strain has reduced him? You want him to win his fight, don't you, for the sake of his future and your own?"

"But you ask us to act like guilty persons," she pleaded. "Judge Strang said 'not guilty.' To me that means that what—whatever we feel for each other is not guilt. If he is not guilty, then neither am I. Why should I lower myself to the standards of the world—why should I hide?"

"Because you are in the world and of it. I profess only a man's friendship for John Cabot. But to protect him I played a rôle which is likely to ruin me professionally. He relies on me at present to look after you. In the event of his demanding to see you, it would be better if I did not know your whereabouts. I advise that you go to the shore somewhere. Let my secretary know when you decide where—you can reach him by telephone—and your remittances will be sent regularly through him. Come, lovely lady, what do you say? Is all John Cabot's strength to be discounted by his weakness for you?"

Dolores leaned over a bowl of purple pansies that kept eyeing her from a near-by tabourette; she gazed into their ingenuous faces.

" But he wouldn't leave me without a word, I know. What would he think—how would he feel if I——"

" Only in the event of his weakening need he know. Have I impressed you with the fact that once he begins to see you, he and I are done for? You are a woman of whom I would have expected that self-sacrificing passion with which a man's friendship compares as a handshake to love's first kiss. Are you unwilling to seem to lose your case with him for a little while? "

He arose, found his hat, and stood for a moment looking down at her. But she looked only into the pansies' hearts. A hopeful smile was on his face as he turned. He nodded confidently at the Airedale, just before closing the door, very quietly, after him.

The puppy, a man's dog, sat sniffing and whining at the sill for some time after his congenial acquaintance had gone. But Dolores did not bewail the attorney's exit. With a fury strange to her, she resented his call, his gentleness, and the cruelty which it wrapped.

What manner of friendship was his, smilingly to urge the torture of his friend in order to save himself? Where was the worth of admiration that demanded of a peccable human passion the blamelessness of one divine? The pansies knew and she knew. But if John learned that she had hidden herself away from him, how could he be expected to know? Love was tender and easily hurt.

Rufus Holt admitted that he had never loved; that he had only his imagination to depend upon. How dared he, then, dictate to a woman whom he had acclaimed true as truth?

But that night a third voice entered the argument.

As Dolores lay abed, wooing in vain the healthful slumber so seldom denied her, she came to wonder whether the sensations which disturbed her were all mental. Could she be physically ill?

As, hour after hour, the wonder and the strangeness of the stirring within her grew, answer came in a wee, small voice—the voice of fear—the voice of hope—perhaps, indeed, the voice of that God said to speak through " the least of these." With none else to tell her, Dolores understood. And in the

darkness a great glory seemed to flood the room. Her heart, which had slowed almost to stopping lest she miss the message, near burst now with painful joy.

The voice, faint and from far away, had whispered unmistakably:

"*Woman, I am coming—thy fulfilment.*"

CHAPTER XX

DOLORES did not send her address to Rufus Holt's secretary, although she came in course of time to need the remittances which were to be forwarded through him. She hated Holt and loved John too much for that. Should that whisper in the night be heard by the world, the fight of the strong would indeed be lost to the weak. There was no choice. She must hide herself that "little while," guilty though she might appear.

She lived in various places. She found various employment.

There was the naturalized tailor who rented the basement of the house where she had found a room, and who seemed to assume from "Mrs. Trevor's" face that she could baste "straight." But she did not "naturalize," either to the shop or his idea of her, and he took to complaining of her work. His subtlety was inadequate to cover his relief when she transferred to a restaurant, one of the sort to which ladies were "cordially" invited. But there came a day when this proprietor, as well, begrudged the price of his mistake.

Even time and time's tutelage did not take the strangeness from the fact that no one wanted her any more.

Weeks and months passed—spring and summer and another fall-time. She was forced to look at her funds, also at the necessity to make them do. That grew to be her chief concern—to make them do.

Moving her bags was expensive, and thinning an Airedale to the finest "point" of safety entailed anxiety. His canine protests against the experiment were what first lifted her eyes to a sign beside the door of a substantial house. A savoury

odour of beef stew wafted from the downstairs windows and attracted the young dog so powerfully that, with ears laid back and muscles straining against his leash, he pulled her up the first two steps. What attracted the girl was the invitation of brass letters laid upon an ebony board:

RETREAT FOR WAYWARD GIRLS

For more than two hours they had been walking slowly. Each day now they walked more slowly. And the slower they walked, the more urgent had grown their present landlady's "want" of their room. The window signs were scarce in this cheap section of the city, said to be congested beyond all record. Such "To Lets" as they had found were said, at the doors, after a momentary inspection, to be already "taken."

So now, weariness and the odour of stew on the crisp autumn air decided the dog. The cold sunlight falling upon the topmost, polished word of the sign—RETREAT—decided the girl.

The matron proved to be quite a good imitation of a mother. The girls under her charge were mostly repentant—some she had graduated into good cheer. "Waywardness" was an infliction to be frankly discussed; to be vied over, sighed and cried over with consoling *camaraderie*. Even the dog was pitied. Indeed, his demands for ready relief were met far too generously for his gastronomic good.

Although the "new girl" did not explain about herself—there was no need for that—she relaxed within the warming atmosphere of the retreat, and tried hard to please. Interestedly she listened to tales of the benevolent gentleman who directed the philanthropy. With so many examples of waywardness about her, she came to take a less strained view of her plight.

But the night and day stories poured into her ears—stories of the undying devotion of the varied "friends," in the varied inmates' cases, who, through varied circumstances, had been separated from their hearts' desires by cruel Fate—filled her with a longing for John Cabot that increased with the approach of her ordeal. Despite her unselfish resolves, she wanted him

to know. He must have been hurt if he knew of her seeming desertion. Her past fear of the "risks," as italicized by Rufus Holt, was wiped off the slate of her mind. The risk of death, which involved the greater risk of loss of love, was writ instead—to stay.

She decided to disregard the lawyer's caution to the extent of a telephone call to John's office. But he was not in, and she dared not leave name or number. To put anything in writing was dangerous, Holt had warned her, yet a note was the only recourse left—one brief, careful note. Stationery and a pen she secured from the matron; forced herself to write briefly and constrainedly; addressed it to Mr. Cabot's banking-house. Lest she permit apprehension to change her mind, she placed her finished missive at once on the table in the hall, where it would be given to the postman on his next round.

She was returning to her room—very slowly now—when the ensuing dialogue, first in a woman's voice, then in a man's, came to her ears from behind a door marked "PRIVATE" that gave into the hall.

"With a sham like you, there's nothing in life. Why didn't I see in time that my husband was the one who should have lived—you the one to die?"

"How like a woman, to shift the blame! Wasn't the whole scheme your own—the cat-boat, the surprise attack, that weird knowledge of——"

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!"

"See, you're the guilty one. You tremble at the truth. I had never heard of a death-spot in the human ear. I couldn't have struck true. And I couldn't have play-acted your grief over the accident. Certainly you ought to grant, Mary, that I was all right then. Expected we'd be married like other folk, once we'd got the business well started on the capital from his life insurance. You say that you have no respect for me. Well, there's more than one cause for a loss of respect. What about mine for you? How can I know when some new lover will tempt you to drive a nail through the lobe of *my* ear—to throw *me* into a tide rip? It isn't a man's nature, I tell you——"

"Don't call yourself a man. You have cheated me unforgivably. Yet——"

"'Yet.' Thank God, we've reached argument's end for to-day! We both know what we know and that I can prove it. More than you hate me, you fear me. Come, we might as well be friends."

"*Friends?* Remember that I can prove it, too, on you."

"But you won't, dear heart. Aren't you tired of threatening me? Eventually you'll settle to living it out peaceably on my terms. Why not now? Come, be sensible and agree——"

One of the voices alone might have puzzled Dolores, but together she had recognized both. They had struck her like a blow. As if physically stunned, she had clung to the balustrade for aid in undertaking the first few steps of the stairway. Now, more strength came to her. Quietly and rapidly as she could, she toiled beyond earshot up the flight.

Out of breath she collapsed on her narrow iron bed, realizing not only the significance to herself of what she had overheard, but its meaning to the two principals as well.

So that was the hideous bond that tied them. That was why each pretended an affection for, considered, and, if need be, defended the other. They had paid a human life for love, but found that crime brought only mutual contempt.

Through the realization of what enforced their hostile, yet voluntary companionship came personal anxiety. Her letter —what if he should notice and examine it? Why hadn't she taken it out and posted it herself?

But there was no time to be wasted over futile afterthoughts. She could not chance his reading so much as the address. She must recover her letter.

From the head of the stairs she could not see whether or not it still lay on the table, which stood in the hall near the street entrance. She could see, however, that the door marked "PRIVATE" was ajar. As no sound of voices came to her, she concluded that the two in the hateful parlour must have gone. She counted possible costs, then again descended the stairs.

They stood beside the table. Not until she saw their faces would she believe the worst. Not only had he noticed the address of the letter, but had opened and was reading it.

A smile was on his face—the pale-eyed, appealing face of Vincent Seff. His agreeable laugh sounded as he turned to Mrs. Hutton.

"Of all the chickens to come home to roost in the coop of little Vin! You remember that pugilistic Puritan, John Cabot? As addressed to him, Mary, what can these hieroglyphics mean? Listen:

"'Soon a rosebud will open its petals to the world. I may not stay to care for it. I depend on you.'"

Impulse ruled Dolores. She crossed the hall; stretched out her hand for the letter; faced them.

"It is mine. You have no right to read it."

For a long moment Seff looked at her. Then he took the lavender-bordered 'kerchief from his sleeve and with it wiped his lips.

"Well met," said he at last, "*Miss Nectarine.*"

"You have no right to open a sealed and stamped letter intended for the post," Dolores insisted. "Will you give it back to me or shall I appeal to the head of this institution?"

"I am the head of the institution. I have a right to do whatever I see fit within its walls." The satisfaction of his smile increased.

Mrs. Hutton, a shade greyer, calmer and handsomer, at first had looked chiefly astonished. Now she intervened.

"Best give it back, Vin. Being what you are—or rather, what you aren't—you can have no interest in the affairs of this girl, unless——"

"Unless. . . . But take your delicate little effusion. I couldn't possibly forget a word of it."

Her letter in hand, Dolores turned and was about to undertake the stairs again, when he stopped her.

"Just a moment, Miss Trent. How long will it take you to clear yourself out of here?"

"But I thought the object of this house——"

"The purpose of the institution is to help girls who repent of their waywardness, not to encourage hardened sinners. I have followed your career in the newspapers. I consider it a privilege to have read your latest attempt at extortion. Naturally I assume that, once your present handicap is overcome, you'll

go on, like a brook, purling round the hearts of men—on and on and on. There are public reformatories for persons of your sort. To realize our ideals, we must be particular here."

Mrs. Hutton, as well as the girl, looked at him. Drawn to the full of his dapper height, his face lit by artistic appreciation of his own pose, his gesture delicately drawn, he might have impressed a stranger as the benevolent patron of the inmates' praise.

But Mary Hutton was not a stranger. That equivocally proud yet contemptuous smile was on her lips as she turned to Dolores.

"You at least will have a child. I have nothing—nothing," she remarked. "Don't be annoyed by a little thing like Vincent Seff, turned to philanthropy and good works."

The ultimatum of the head of the Retreat increased the urgency of Dolores' letter. She posted it herself before setting out to find a new place. She was fortunate, however. Before night she had located a rooming-house "lady" sufficiently in need, sufficiently pessimistic, sufficiently old and shiftless and poor-spirited as to waive references and accept two weeks' rental in advance. Here she laid in what she could still pay for towards her needs; here she lived alone and waited with hard-dying hope.

Since she had found this place so soon, she regretted the hasty posting of her note. Rather than chance another of those risks to John, of which the deposed shopkeeper's suggestions had increased her fear, she had given her new address to that quite good imitation of a mother, the matron of the Retreat, for the forwarding of mail or the convenience of any friends who might telephone about her or call to see her.

The incidents of her days became the variation from morning confidence to evening despondency; of her nights, the discarding, under crush of the blackness, of one after another of her schemes for a second and more direct message. Whether in the daytime or at night, a bark of the dog at an unaccustomed sound would rouse her to radiance—to heart-hammering joy; his growling return to the tedium of his life would bring her back to heart-stilling disappointment. Either John had made

no response to her appeal or the matron had failed to supply the address.

Heavier upon her pressed thoughts of the power of her enemies. Where would her note lead Catherine Cabot if it chanced into the hands of her hirelings? What might not Seff reveal? How much might those omniscient detectives learn from their watch of John?

So far Fate had conspired against her with a nice regard for every detail. She became possessed by the pertinent query: Why should *she* expect the mind of Fate to change?

Any question over the advisability of telephoning Rufus Holt was answered by her inability to go out in search of a booth. Just before one fevered dawn the idea of advertisement came and crowded out the sickening controversy over whether John or the matron was to blame. Why hadn't that occurred to her before? In a return of expectation, she composed a "personal" that seemed to her adequately "covered" —recognizable only to him addressed. There was piquancy in the thought that the Press which had been her enemy should now serve her as a friend. She was fortunate in that she knew which of the morning papers he was accustomed to read with care—doubly fortunate that there still was enough left of her hoard to pay for a notice.

The poor-spirited landlady looked especially pessimistic over the errand on which she was asked to go, any chance of a reward depending upon its success. Her new tenant was likely to be a great deal of trouble, she anticipated aloud, and she never before had been reduced to taking in dogs. Had not the room been so long vacant, she would not have considered the pair of them. She suspected, moreover, from the things they were doing without, that they had about reached the limit of their wherewithal. However, none could say but what she always looked on the bright side of things, and she'd do her best about getting all the display the money would buy for the personal.

Dolores' confidence increased after the old woman had gone. Such doubts as crowded in, she exorcized with the reminder that her advertisement would have succeeded or failed in one day's time. Often in the past she had deplored the fact that

the marvellous output of the press should die in a day; now she rejoiced in the fact. By to-morrow he would have come or—— But she would not—dared not face the alternative.

That night her baby was born.

The old woman did what she had time for and the charity doctor stayed a while. Afterward, Dolores must have sunk into a state of semi-consciousness—must have slept or dozed away the time, for she roused to incredulity on being told that it was noon of the next day.

Two other facts penetrated her listlessness. The life of that day's *Times* must soon be spent, and her child was a girl.

Suppose he did not come. That meant that another girl-child was fatherless. Already, in the world's opinion, she would be accounted worse than motherless.

As before, time became merely a variation of hope and despondency. . . . What was that? Surely, an Airedale bred to watchfulness would not grow so excited had he not recognized a step or a voice! . . . But no, he was a silly dog silly and extremely bored. He and she, too, must have imagined the step and the voice.

A girl, their babe—a hapless little human, who was not to inherit even such paternal affection and care as could be spared from poppy paste. Another girl she had brought into a world which had no justice for unprotected girls. . . . Perhaps, if he did not come, it would be best that their baby be spared the learning of life—the humiliations, the disillusionments, the death-stab of love that lied. . . . Since he had not come, love *must* have lied. Both her messages could not have gone astray. There was significance in this second failure. Too late to protect her from his weakness had come his strength. If he did not, *would* not come——

She must be very ill; must have dozed off a while—that is, if the old woman told the truth about night having come again. . . . Likely she *had* told the truth, for the room was quite dark, except for the one dim gas-jet lit in the old-fashioned chandelier.

The landlady had come in to say that she wanted the room as soon as Dolores was able to get about. A single gentleman

had inquired about it that day. Mrs. Trevor would remember her saying from the first that she never took in dogs or babies. She knew what babies were—just one sick spell after another, and she had no space in the back-yard for regular laundry. She was a kind-hearted woman and honest about her bargains, the Lord knew. But she had herself to think of and the other folk in the house. She wasn't one to worry a fellow woman sick-a-bed, but the gent had said he would come in the morning for his answer. Naturally she would need to name the exact day he could come. Her soft heart always had been her worst enemy, but business was business.

After the old woman had dismalled herself out, Dolores' gaze strayed to the gas-jet. The turned-down flame fascinated her and seemed to make a light in her mind. It flickered an answer to the embarrassing question of when she could give over the room. . . . What time was it now? . . . Nine o'clock. . . . The day that was the life of a news-sheet was long since done. . . . There were three jets to the chandelier.

It wasn't going to take long. Already she was affected by the fumes. The dog was sniffing suspiciously, whining protest. . . .

"A life for a life," she told him unfeelingly, thinking of Jack, the only one who had ever loved without harming her. But then—the Airedale, after all, had not asked Jack's life any more than she had asked her mother's. . . . She arose, tottered to the door, took him by the nape of the neck and thrust him into the pure air of the hall.

Fortunately the babe was too young to realize or complain; would never know about life—never know! Dolores held the small form to her heart and shuddered anew over what life might have meted out to so tiny and helpless a creature.

"There is the mark of the seal they call the signet of Solomon," she mumbled through the dark to the chandelier. "There are to will, and to have your will. There are your social ideas, your excesses, your pleasures that end in death——"

Who was it had reminded her of Maupassant not so very

long ago ? Oh, yes . . . that night. . . . What, indeed, was folly but " a riotous expenditure of will " ? . . . He had not seemed a man to shirk the obligations of his folly—John Cabot—that night. Yet he had not come. . . . So tender he had seemed in his madness for her ; so willing to deny himself ; so determined to consider her. He had made her realize the happiness which she and Jack had tried to learn from a bird. . . . Still, where now—was happiness ? . . . And God—where was God ?

Who was bending over her ? . . . Amor—could that be the gallant love-lad, so broken and so gaunt ? Had he come to mock her ? . . . And was it Innocentia clinging, peaked and weeping, to his hand ?

Sorry comforters, the two. Their visit distressed her more than the nauseous fumes from the jets.

There were Vincent Seff and Mary Hutton, now. Why were they still together ? . . . Strange that whichever died first, the other would be there, attentive to the end lest the fear of God overcome the fear of man in a death-bed repentance. . . . They could be sure of each other's company to the end. Hate, then, bound people closer than love. . . . Love ? How lonely was love !

" I never—knew God, but I knew—you. Why—*why* hast thou—forsaken—me ? "

The gasp was wrung from her stress of body and soul. In the darkness and the aloneness it quavered heart-brokenly upward with her thought of John Cabot.

Then she remembered the lady she had admired in the railway station, long, long ago—the lady who had sneezed. She hadn't made the usual fuss about it ; had just leaned out and done it, neatly and composedly. . . . What was human life but a sneeze ? Birth was the warning ; youth the preparation ; life the sniffing—death the wiping of eyes. After death perhaps one settled back into composure. . . . The lady had proved a good example in so many crises of her life, it was well to have remembered her in death. . . . She must make no fuss ; must do it neatly and composedly.

She threw back her head ; set her lips hard ; breathed deep and long . . . deep and long . . . deep and long. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

" A woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she, being with child, cried, travailling in birth and pained to be delivered."

THE girl-shade heard the words intoned in *mezzo voce.* At the door of the throne-room she paused, loath to enter the next scene of the co-star piece. All the day following the completion of her story of earth, she had lain within her chamber, in a state of narcosis, varied only by the dull ache of dread. All day she had expected the summons which now had come, that she should appear before the King. Through the séances she had done her best; had whipped her spirit as a slave-seller might have lashed some modest, naked body on the block. She had come for the reckoning. If so be she had met the royal expectations, her reward would be that lowest high office yet assigned in Greater Gehenna—She-Destroyer of Womankind. If she had failed——

" And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born."

Again the deep intonations. Glancing into the blaze of light which had confused her eyes after her approach through the dim, winding corridors, Dolores saw a tall figure, in the full effect of male evening attire on earth, with back towards her and gestures directed into one of the mercurized walls.

Her hesitation was mastered by her surprise. Even on closer view, she could scarcely believe that this superb copy of the men of Earth was indeed His Satanic Majesty. His hair, formerly pompadoured to conceal his horns, was clipped, parted on one side and slicked back, the indices of power evidently razored close. The auburn Vandyke which had been inseparable from her concept of him was the more noticeable now for its absence. In its place, a smile whose charm

would have been hard to describe clothed the well-sculped lips.

The lines and colour of His Highness' costume adhered to what she knew was " latest " form—all except his tie. That was of a red which vividly reminded her of that Justice Roscoe Strang, whose independence of judicial precedent had been suggested by a like daring note in otherwise sombre dress.

" Ah, sweet Grief," he saluted her, " I feel indebted to you for the basic idea of my sermon on ' The Service of Suicide.' You've caught me at a rehearsal. I was just reading my text, ' To Hell with the Ill-Begot.' We mustn't overlook the propaganda out of the mouths of babes and sucklings in our new Drive of Destruction, eh ? "

" Mustn't we ? " she evaded wretchedly.

" Come, cheer down ! Did my mere mention of a sermon make you pull the doleful face of the average religionist in church ? You haven't said how you like my style to-night. Am I not beautiful and *à la mode* ? "

He appeared to be in an unusually amiable mood. A turn or two he took around her, evidently to note the reflection on her face as well as in the mirror.

" Is it possible "—in sudden suspicion he peered at her—" that you don't like me razored ? "

" You look—very well."

" I look—' very well.' " He aped her effortful tone. " Didst note her burst of enthusiasm ? In gratitude, she's not so different from the rest of womankind. What one of them ever realized that a man would rather remove a mountain from the physiognomy of the earth than the beard from his face ? As for the horns from his head ! "

" But really, I do like it—very well indeed ! "

" ' Very well indeed ' ! " Satan threw out his hands in a farcical gesture of despair. " What man who shaves his beard to please a woman ever really pleases her ? "

" To please me, Your Lowness ? "

" Sin's idea. That silhouette you drew of your pet philanthropist shows you to have preconceived ideas of the looks of latter-day devils. I haven't spent centuries catering to human preconceptions for nothing. Presto ! even John Cabot's crime

toward you is no blacker than my cut-faced clothes! My tie is a bit off—that is *on*—colour, as it were. But I notice that no man is held accountable for his taste in cravats. Maybe I *was* dressed like a character part."

With the frank self-appreciation of a husband who has just been hectored into an evening suit by his wife, he turned for a critical survey of her appearance.

"Glad to see you looking fit to go out with me," he approved. "I have planned to take you to a show."

"To hear you preach?" She put the assumption rather eagerly. "I am so glad. I have hoped each night that you would take me. Frequently when hearing you talk, I have wondered whether you would—whether you wouldn't——"

She faltered at his look of amazement.

"If I wouldn't just what, child?" he encouraged with all the unctuous kindliness of the Rev. Dr. Alexander Willard.

"Wouldn't teach me the Scriptures. You seem to know them by heart."

"By head, not by heart. There's a difference, you know." Satan's chuckles began with his contemplation of her idea. "Really, you are either the most naïve or the most intriguing of lost souls."

"But seriously," she insisted.

"Oh, *seriously*!" He laughed the more. "Well, seriously, my poor child, I'd advise you to remember the clay feet of the 'Sporting Parson.' Far be it from me to try to improve a perfectly bad mind. 'The Little Book shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey, but shall make thy belly bitter.' That's one of my own handy, illiterate translations. M'lady, the carriage awaits. Time we were on our way."

He was pleased to drive her to the promised entertainment in his favourite Hawk. While drifting through the drab air of night in Gehenna, lit only by that "pale, abiding light" whose dynamo was beyond control of his electricians, he explained the kind of "show" to which he was escorting her. In it he was not to star, no. It was only a motion picture, but one in which he felt that she, as well as he, would take interest.

They were to see, in fact, a picturization of certain unfinished

details connected with her own career on earth, over which he, for one, felt curiosity. He had ordered the life-films to date of John Cabot brought from the supply house and cut to give a comprehensive exposé of a character that would refuse to heed the death cries of a girl whom, by the honour code of Earth, he was bound to protect. Satan himself had hit on an apt title, but had not viewed the picture, and had left the sub-titling to his first fiend-scenarist. He hoped for an entertaining presentation.

At the Devil's Own Playhouse it was evident that the feature had been extensively billed. The capacity of the theatre was taxed to standing-room when the King led his interesting guest into the royal box. Down over the billows of faces that waved back at their entrance, Dolores looked with pitying eyes. On a few was apathy ; on more, fevered eagerness ; on most, apprehension. The Sea of the Fear of Despair they were —a Dead Sea, indeed. She, too, soon was carried out toward its white-caps of hoping thoughts, caught in its undertow. This she realized from the emotion within herself which began with the curtain's rise—the deeps of heartbreak disturbed by the high winds of hope.

The camera was said not to lie. If His Highness' boasted topical review was bona fide, some excuse might evolve for him who had refused to heed her call.

The series of incidents unfolded upon the super-quick silver screen may most readily be grasped, perhaps, by a perusal of the working synopsis to which the master-director of Hell Films cut the production.

THE TURN TURTLE

HIS SATANIC MAJESTY
Presents
JOHN CABOT
In Facts from His Natural History
Shown in Three Turns

(*On Screen*)

THE TURN TURTLE IS AN INSIGNIFICANT REPTILE, GREAT ONLY IN ITS COWARDICE. IT NEVER LOOKS DANGER IN THE

FACE, BUT AT FIRST ALARM PULLS IN ITS HEAD AND SCUTTLES AWAY. WATCH THIS ONE.

Turtle enters slowly. Protrudes head. Looks around. Face changes to that of John Cabot. A pair of hands—recognizably Dolores Trent's—appear. Stretch toward turtle. Face shows fright. Head withdraws into shell. Turtle crawls off.

(*On Screen*)

THE FIRST TURN

John Cabot enters his Broad Street office. Seats himself at desk. Goes through pile of letters in weary manner. Stops to study one.

(*Show in Dolores' Handwriting—Envelope of Dolores' note, with "Personal" underscored and the return address of Retreat for Wayward Girls in corner.*)

John interrupted by arrival of Rufus Holt who looks worried, but tries to cheer up when John asks about Dolores. Attorney assures John:

(*Insert*) "*Miss Trent is comfortably settled at a shore resort, as well and happy as can be expected until matters are settled.*"

With a gesture John asks Holt to wait until he has finished his mail. Again takes up Dolores' letter. Is unfolding enclosure when Catherine, in street costume, enters. She shows amused surprise at Holt's presence, but insists that he remain when he attempts to leave.

She takes chair which John places for her. From her purse produces a ticket which she offers for his inspection.

(*Show—Transportation on Trans-Atlantic Blimp.*)

At John's surprise, Catherine offers plaintive explanation:

(*Insert*) "*In two weeks I am going abroad as a sort of memorial to Jackie—to help to mother the war orphans over there.*"

John studies her coldly, taps forefinger on desk as replies:

(*Insert*) "*Another of your trick trips? Well, Europe is not*

far these days. A radiogram, a quick flight home, and better luck with your suit-for-absolute next time—perhaps."

Catherine affects sadness at his suspicion. Droops toward him over desk with reproachful, luring smile. Seems about to weep. Feels for 'kerchief. Drops eyelids. Is able to read Dolores' envelope. Picks it up. Studies it. Sneers:

(*Insert*) "*What a heart you have for wayward girls! Is this a love letter or a dun?*"

Ends interview with steady stare of suspicion at Holt, who stands nervously beside a window.

When Catherine has gone, John settles his thoughts on subject.

(*Show in Dolores' Handwriting*—"*Soon a rosebud will open its petals to the world. I may not stay to care for it. I depend on you.*")

John turns upon Holt. Without explaining, accuses him of perfidy. Holt departs, depressed by their danger of exposure.

John calls a taxi. Drives at once to the Retreat. Is putting his query to the matron when Vincent Seff emerges from room marked "Private." Mutual recognition instant. Seff does the lofty philanthropic. In answer to John's demands he claims to know nothing of Miss Trent except that duty forced him to eject her from Home the previous day.

Matron tries to proffer information, but is cut short by Seff, who assures her aside:

(*Insert*) "*It is for the girl's best good that we throw this bloodhound off the scent. Trust my judgment.*"

Matron retires from scene without giving address. Seff, with exaggerated courtesy draped over his triumph and sneers, shows John the door.

John drives at once to a detective agency. There, with hard-suppressed impatience, he engages them to find the girl. Suggests:

(*Insert*) "*Comb all the taxi and express stands in the vicinity, grill the matron of the Retreat, and shadow Seff.*"

Scene shifts to hall-way outside Dolores' room. Aged landlady emerges. Puts on spectacles. Reads advertisement entrusted to her.

(*On Screen in Dolores' Handwriting*)

Wasted

Unless you come to me at once.
979 *East* 17*th Street.*

Counts money given for its insertion. Departs kitchenward. Mutters:

(*Insert*) "*Money's a sure thing. This ad. ain't. I owe something to myself, and sure, so does she.*"

As days pass John is tortured by alternate hope and disappointment. Detectives make reports, but nothing comes of their search. He grows haggard and desperate.

Catherine comes again to office with an appeal to his patriotism. Expresses herself as shocked by change in him. Gets generous cheque for her proposed philanthropy abroad. Suggests sarcastically:

(*Insert*) "*Better join me in this sail overseas. With your money, and your sympathy for waywardness, you'd find a lot to do in demoralized Europe.*"

John scorns even to refuse. Once outside office, Catherine seeks a telephone booth. Gets her own detective agency. Orders extra close watch on husband's movements.

(*On Screen*)

THE SECOND TURN

At his club John finds himself distracted. Cannot listen to conversation of friends. Seeks office. Over telephone gets the usual assurance from his detective that "something" is about to happen. Decides to wait at office. Looks at desk calendar.

(*Show—October* 31, *date of Dolores' death.*)

John paces floor through terrible night. Imagines forms of Amor and Innocentia pleading with him. Sees reproachful face of Jack peering at him from the shadows. Curses past weakness and present impotency.

Meanwhile, in bedroom at Cabot town-house, Catherine sleeps. Smiles like innocent child in her guilty dreams.

Dolores' landlady arises from sound slumber. Goes about her sordid tasks. Smells gas. Traces it. Airedale is on guard outside tenant's door. Landlady entices him away with a bit of meat from kitchen below. Breaks into room. Makes startling discovery. Mother and babe dead upon the bed. Her first thought after turning off gas is for meter. Reads it. Gets greatly excited.

In kitchen landlady retrieves Dolores' advertisement and money for payment. On consideration, she decides that best chance of getting bill paid by a dead tenant lies in possible live answer to the ad. Goes to *Times* office on belated errand. Proffers "personal."

(*On Screen*)

IN THIS WISE—ONLY ONE DAY LATE—THE "PERSONAL" OF DOLORES TRENT APPEARS.

In office of an evening newspaper the veiled ad. in morning paper catches eye of sub-editor.

(*On Screen in Print*)

Wasted

Unless you come to me at once.
979 *East* 17*th Street.*

Editor calls reporter, who goes to East Side address.

John emerges from club with copy of *Times* under arm. At kerb buys copies of two other newspapers. As he gets into limousine, lets one—the *Times*—fall into mud.

(*On Screen*)

AS USUALLY HAPPENS, THE "PERSONAL" IS NOT READ BY THE PERSON FOR WHOM INTENDED.

John glances at fallen paper regretfully. As cab starts, he turns to financial pages of other paper.

Up street wind drives copy of *Times*. Blows it open.

(*On Screen in Print*)

Wasted

Unless you come to me at once.
979 *East* 17*th Street.*

Hoof of dray horse stamps out legibility of printed words.

(*On Screen*)

WELL IT IS FOR THE SOLVING OF MYSTERIES THAT THE PUBLIC NEED NOT DEPEND UPON THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF DETECTIVE AGENCIES.

Reporter finds East Seventeenth Street address. Frightens landlady with questions about ad. Persuades her to let him into Dolores' room. Recognizes face of notorious girl. Emerges under thrill of a "beat."

Sub-editor in evening newspaper office takes discovery over telephone. Rattles sensational story through typewriter and composing room into print.

In another office an un-wise old "owl" of John's detective agency gets a start from headlines of latest edition.

(*On Screen in Print*)

Dolores Trent a Suicide.
Goes to End by Gas.
Takes Birthling for Company.

Agency chief shows himself capable of real speed after things have been detected for him. Makes for John's office. Must prepare employer for shock, he declares. They have found the girl, although dead. The address is John's only demand. It is supplied—without reference to newspaper. He hastens there.

Pessimistic landlady will let none except authorities into bedroom until bills are paid.

(*Insert*) "*It uses up a sight of gas to kill a grown woman and a healthy baby.*"

John crushes green-backs into her hand and strides into room.

Upon bed lies dead girl.

(*On Screen*)

WITH BACK-THROWN HAIR HER MOURNING VEIL, SMILELESS IN DEATH AS SHE HAD BEEN THROUGH LIFE, SHE CLASPS TO HER BREAST THE CLAY OF HIS CHILD AND HERS, OF WHOSE EXISTENCE A DETECTIVE HAD FIRST TOLD HIM. "GRIEF TO MEN" AT LAST TEACHES ONE MAN THE ACME OF GRIEF.

John bends over her. His lips move.

(*Insert*) "*I have murdered what I love. Can you forgive?*"

Sinks to knees beside bed. Lays face in her hair. Shudders in agony of regret

THE THIRD TURN

(*On Screen*)

THE DIGIT OF DEATH POINTS BACK TO THE DIVORCE CASE OF CABOT *v.* CABOT.

In imposing room of Bar Association, Rufus Holt stands trial for his professional life. He is charged with having "thrown" the first divorce case he ever lost. Faces of jury of brother lawyers grow contemptuous when prosecutor sums up evidence against him—his visit to Judge Strang's apartment with Cabot co-respondent, as reported by lift attendant, later his protectorate of girl and payment of her bills, as proved by florist and manager of up-town hotel, and his continued friendship with John Cabot. Now the suicide of the girl, and the death of the infant conceived during period of sojourn in the Cabot home clinches case.

Holt to be formally disbarred. Is broken by disgrace, and denied friendship of man for whom he took the risk. Leaves trial room.

(*On Screen*)

MRS. CABOT FINDS A NEW USE FOR "BLIMPS."

In her quarters at Cabot town-house, Catherine and maid are engaged in packing trunks. Two society friends announced. Shown into disordered suite. Ask questions. Is it true, as papers say, that Mrs. Cabot is going to make trans-Atlantic flight? Catherine gives laughing assurance:

(*Insert*) "*I've always enjoyed being first, my dears. I guess I am first to fly from unpleasant notoriety. It will be a joy-ride, as my new lawyer is sure of winning my reopened divorce case.*"

(*On Screen*)

DUST TO DUST

Beside grave of Trevor Trent, digger finishes double task. Enters auto-hearse, followed by single limousine. John steps from car as coffin is lowered. Carries arm-load of roses. Face emotionless. Tears off handful of rose petals. Scatters them into grave. Lips move.

(*Insert*) "*God grant that nothing is wasted.*"

As he turns away, with last offices performed, he is stopped and questioned by reporter who first published news of Dolores' death. John at first refuses to answer. Shows deep thought, then inspiration.

(*Insert*) "*You may say that I am sailing for Europe in the trans-Atlantic blimp. Yes, with Mrs. Cabot.*"

Reporter stands astonished.

(*On Screen*)

THAT JOHN CABOT DESERVES HIS REPUTATION FOR SHREWDNESS IS THE NEWS-HOUND'S THOUGHT. SO THAT IS HIS LATEST SCHEME FOR PROTECTING THE NAME OF THE TRENT GIRL—TO STOP THE POSSIBLE REOPENING OF HIS WIFE'S SUIT BY GOING ABROAD WITH HER, WHETHER SHE WANTS HIM OR NOT!

(*Cut Back*) Turtle appears. Protrudes head. Sees appealing hands. Withdraws head. Turns. Scuttles away.

THE END

(*Passed by Board of Censure*)

HELL FILMS

CHAPTER XXII

FOR some minutes after the lights had flashed over The Devil's Own, the two in the royal box sat gazing at the flat silver surface so recently deep with the shadows and highlights of life as lived on Earth. Neither noticed that the dead sea of faces below was enlivened by recognition of the King's favourite before it ebbed away beneath the balcony. Neither heard the swish of whispers that passed from wave to wave —gossip retailed from court, vilified innuendo, speculation over the Belialic intent in entertaining the lately arrived star of the piece with her death's aftermath.

In truth, both host and guest were self-absorbed in emotion roused by the play, but emotion quite antipodal. Satan's shaved face showed plainly his astonishment; it worked with his darkling rage. Hers lifted roofward a glory that so outshone the super-lighted dome as to suggest the far-distant source of that radiance which no Avernian device might dim.

"It was not what I expected—the picture," Satan remarked, with ominous restraint. "The titling was good, but the plot didn't fit. That damned turn-turtle didn't turn!"

Dolores was too charged with an inspired decision to realize his displeasure. She turned to him; stretched out her hand; touched his arm.

"You said that you could put me in spiritual connection with the women of Earth," she reminded him. "Could you also with men—with John?"

"Why, pray, with John?"

The cruelty of the smile which had been so charming

awhile back should have warned her, but she must have been blinded by that light from within.

"Didn't you see how he suffered from self-reproach? Don't you realize that he is still suffering?" She sighed in her voice of sad winds. "Surely you gathered from the picture that during all those age-long minutes of the time I died from doubt, he still loved me—that he loves me now? I want to implore his forgiveness."

Her smile, timid from its rarity, strained to disappear, although she tried to hold it.

"I've done my best to please you," she wheedled nervously. "Won't you do this for me—just free my spirit for one short hour by the time of Earth?"

"So! You'd rather go back to that puny mortal, than on and on—with me?"

"Oh, but I'll come back, and go on and on so cheerfully! I give you my word," she assured him. "I'll do everything I can for you. Just grant me the hour. It's not the fraction of a second to you. You say that you never have cared for anyone. Yet you boast of your imagination. Can't you imagine what it means really to care? Won't you try?"

"I might do that." He eyed her. "I might try."

All the drive home his manner was detached. He did not repulse her gratitude for his grudging consideration of her request. Neither did he explain that he was trying to imagine what "caring" would be like—but trying through jealousy, its cruellest mood.

"I will tell you—well, afterward," he said, on bidding her "sleep light" within Apollyon Palace.

"After what?" asked she.

"That I don't know myself as yet," he snapped.

Afterward—if only we could know the afterward before!

Dolores slept light. Through the next day her regret increased that she had not dared Satan's wrath and demanded a definite period to her suspense. Feelings unwontedly rebellious filled her that she must wait to know—rather, that John must wait.

Over the babe—their babe—she crooned her hope. To Adeline she whispered her apprehension. Something in the

hard, planning look of the unfair fiend, in his superiority to any attempt at cleverness, in his abstraction even while listening to compliments over his driving——

When was afterward ?

Satan, too, asked himself questions through that day.

A far busier leader than any king or president of Earth, since he had the evil of all nations to direct, he yet found time from his activities to remember the boomerang blow to himself of last night's " show."

His chamber of state glowed as with St. Elmo's fire, while he lightning-flashed his orders through infinity, defying the " static " of Earth and Heaven and the void between. Piteously he drove his Minions of Malice toward the consummation of crimes unique or foul enough to merit his supervision. No measurement exists to compute the watts of energy required to transmit the royal will in this orgy of action. But what did he care that the Gehennan sun was dimmed by the draught until it looked a mere balloon ?

As the artificial daylight went into eclipse, greener grew the colour of the Satanic mood—a hard green, mixed from the yellow of chagrin and the blue-black of rage. It did not help in the slightest to have Old Original commiserate him on the projection of a picture which had shown his rival running true ; no more did that unworthy's impious request that he be appointed royal previewer of all future films. Even the minister's report on the entire success of a particularly contemptible political coup which he had devised for the postponement of that good will toward men threatened in the " Little Book " did not long divert him.

At length, consigning the rest of the day's devilry to various fiend aides, the Author of Evil forced his mind to concentrate on the vital question evolved from last night. How best might mortal pusillanimity be revealed to the rose-goggled eyes of true love ?

Through the mood which he had been suffering since the fiasco of his " evening out," he recognized violent tendencies within himself which made him feel, more than ever before, his power to devise and inflict suffering. In this case, how-

ever, violence would not do ; it would destroy what he wished to create. With meticulous delicacy he must handle this feminine mind if he hoped to pluck therefrom its dearest idealization.

What can the heart of woman not forgive ? He asked himself and considered, one by one, many answers.

" *I* could never forgive infidelity ! "

At that loudest and oftenest cry of the wives of the world, the malignant lips curled. " *Never ?* " Yet most did forgive —who found it advisable so to do.

" Liquor ? I *couldn't* endure that kind of a beast."

But which martyr-wife exchanged her drunken lord except for a better fate ?

" Dishonesty ? I *wouldn't* live with a man I didn't respect."

Wouldn't she ? Then why were the jail-gates draped with weeping faces and stretching arms—why the late-life efforts to " live it down " of the work-wasted woman and the husband who had served out his time ?

Never ? Couldn't ? Wouldn't ? What the heart of woman cannot forgive is what she has not been called upon to forgive. The libertine's lady might just as well have learned to endure shame through ebriety, the drunkard's dupe through lechery.

What type of man, then, does the mind of woman most despise ? A villain ? Scarcely, when the worst are loved the best. A traitor, a weakling, a failure ? For the lowest of these, pardons are pleaded. Upon them, regenerating love is poured. What—*what* to her is the sin unpardonable ?

With eyes closed against possible distractions, Satan rough-shadowed the suspects of his thoughts. And just when his mind seemed emptied of ideas, he had it.

Of course. *Of course !* A detected coward was what she could not forgive, woman. He would star one earthling for the benefit of his spirit-mate in a play of cowardice. " Afterward " ? After he was through, she would scarcely press her request.

From their Limbian " Information " he inquired the name

of the personal devil of John Cabot. Upon learning that an imp named Okeh attended the banker, he demanded instant connection by wireless telephone. This he got with a promptness that might be commended to the attention of mortal systematizers.

"That you, Okeh?" he asked. "I hear that you're responsible for the evil impulses of a Mr. John Calvin Cabot. . . . You speak as if you were proud of the fact. You needn't be. . . . What say? . . . But I have a perfectly bad right to insult you. . . . A chance at me is just what I'm going to give you—a chance to prove your efficiency. I want the Cabot programme for the immediate future. Quick, now. I am not used to waiting."

Amid sulphuric anathemas at his informant, Satan noted the report. Sailing for Europe in half an hour on a trans-Atlantic liner, was he? Enemy wife, all unknowing as yet, was blimping it along? In the old nick of time, as usual, was he to wish the undevoted couple *mal voyage*. So the Marquis d'Elie, too, was to be on board? After all, the "Turn Turtle" must think more of the Trent girl's battered reputation than of his own pleasure.

If the big blimp was to sail in a few minutes, what was Mr. Cabot doing in the morasses of Brooklyn, only half-way to the flying field? The agate-eyed personal devil was ready with explanations. The gentleman's wife was reopening a suit for divorce on the strength of an illegitimate child whom circumstantial evidence proved to be his. The air trip was to celebrate all but the actual verdict in her favour. Cabot had started late that he might board at the last moment, thereby giving her an unhappy surprise. His car unfortunately had run into a jam around an open-air evangelist—a sensational religionist who was enthralling crowds everywhere, the Rev. Dr. Alexander Willard by name.

Scarcely could Satan restrain his risibilities. What a contretemps! Here was the deposed divine, forced to the Free Church of Outdoors by the siren Grief, with his eloquence delaying her last victim's flight from the scandal she had brought upon him. How delightfully diabolic!

For the sake of his own recent experiment at popularizing

the once-tedious sermon, His Augustness ordered Okeh to short-mouth for him certain of " Nimrod's " shots.

" I used to hunt birds and beasts. Now I hunt the hearts of men. God is my guide, Hallelujah ! So what care I that I am shut out from the temples of those who call themselves the righteous ? The world is too small a church for me. Through the tall timbers of humanity I hunt immortal souls. Look out for me, you quaking quail of a woman ! Look out for me, you running rabbit of a man ! You can't escape me through the underbush of your hypocrisy. I don't miss, once I take aim. Hallelujah ! I am gunning for *you* ! "

Lest the imp might mistake his dishonest amusement, Satan cut off the report. " Enough of that irreverent stuff. Listen carefully now to instructions from the First and Last. That liner will wait for a man of Cabot's importance. See that you get aboard with him. You're to closer-than-a-brother him through an opportunity for inciting cowardice which will present itself. While he sleeps, insinuate into his mind a terror of death by falling and by drowning. Strengthen his primal instinct of self-protection. This is the last chance you get with me. If you fail to make an arrant coward of this man, you'll find yourself out of a devilling job for death. I am busy now, as you'd better be. A bad afternoon to you ! "

The Regent of Reversals was " on terms " with the elements, as with all forces for evil through good. On hearing the calm had been planned for the high-seas, he discarded the idea of a marine storm.

Always had his worst results been obtained through natural causes. Indeed, he had come to pride himself that no cause was *too* natural for him. Particularly did he dislike, for reasons of his own, to interfere with a rainbow, it being a symbol to him that the Earth would not be destroyed by water. Since he had only fire as a weapon, he would be in a bad fix if the coup ultimate should be sprung upon him with water power. Of course, the coup wasn't to be sprung, not if he could forestall it, but even yet he was wracked by unrighteous rage every time he recalled Noah's Flood. That time, he had been about as powerful as a case of dynamite—

soaked. One decent thing about the Great-I-Am was that He never forgot a promise. One could count upon a rainbow, once one saw it. And Satan was " counting."

Upon the single great indestructible under his control he must depend to vary the monotony of a placid sea. Never had the three single-eyed Cyclopeans of mythology failed to serve his purposes. Lightning Flash, Thunderbolt, and Rolling Thunder would advance his scheme.

Motivation and " natural causes " arranged, he sent a peremptory summons for the Prime Minister, and to him detailed instructions in the duties of a proxy escort. An hour before dawn Sin was to awaken the Royal Entertainer and conduct her straightway to the stadium of the Ball of Life. That ' best bubble " of infernal invention was to entertain her by picturing some interesting Earth events as they occurred.

" I shall not fail Your Damnity," the old toady assured him.

" Better not," was all Satan said as he finger-flashed his First Emissary of Evil out of the royal suite.

His Master Crier was called ; told to issue a general invitation to the forthcoming spectacle ; warned that the stadium must be filled to its last seat, despite the unconventional hour. Not until this sop to his vanity had been applied, did His Lowness close the " office " and himself depart.

With the failure of his past-tense picture-play in mind, he betook himself to the stadium and the preparations for this greatest and latest show under Earth. There must be no miscues about a performance upon which depended the success of that " experiment " inspired by Dolores' earth-tales of joys, as well as griefs to men. He would make his own tests of the complicated apparatus, although the plant had not failed him since installation.

To prove that the Ball of Life functioned properly was his first concern. Giving it a turn, he watched the reflector pool for shadows. When the shimmering prisms of the mercury-like pond had been quieted, he was rewarded by an intimate look at a naval review somewhere on the China Sea, within focus of which the overhung ball had chanced to stop.

The finder he next put to test. This instrument, of gradu-

ated tubes like those of a monster telescope, controlled the lenses of the all-seeing ball. At will, he caused it to pick up this scene and that, finally locating the dirigible which was to be the central figure of the forthcoming event, as it tossed on waves of air above the Atlantic.

Closer attention did he give to the aurograph, a practicable device worked out to supplement the spectroscope, which combined on an enormous scale the principles of the radio-telephone and the phonograph. Back of the stadium, well out of way of the suspended ball, the antennæ—an elaborate network of wires—were suspended by metal-like balloons. These were insulated from Gehenna, except for the central converging wires, which led to multi-power generators. Upon a huge sounding board were the messages received, thence communicated to the stadium by annunciators. The tuning of this masterpiece of etheric control occasioned Satan some concern, but finally was accomplished to his satisfaction.

Back on the control platform, surrounded by his technical chiefs, His Highness watched the stadium fill. As the appointed hour approached, he ran up the green walls which surrounded the terraced seats, and from the pool flashed an order that all spectators must adjust the small dynamos of the eye-shades with which they were provided on entering. He wished none to fail to see to the end the abasement of John Cabot.

A moment he hesitated, then he took up the telephone connected with the royal box. The lackadaisical voice of Old Original responded.

"Dame Dolores in her place?"

On being assured of that important fact, he turned to the Master Mechanic.

"Step on the music!"

Upon all ears burst an orchestration, The Song of the Sea. As surely did they hear it as though it had been carried hellward by the wind through shells, crevasses and metallic splinters. As by lutes and æolean harps it was played, with crashes and staccato rumblings for bass.

The drama of mortal cowardice, destined to turn into contempt a too-long-lasting love, was "on."

CHAPTER XXIII

DAY lifts from her couch of mists to awaken betimes the Sea, her slumbering lord.

Last evening he had ordered her from his presence, as usual ashamed that she should witness his embrace of that mistress of his passions, Night, who incites him to the blackest of his crimes. Yet this morning she tiptoes down to his vast chamber, pale and sleepy-eyed in her diaphanous *peignoir*, there to hover over him, eager and fearful to give the early call.

Will he arise blustering, splash about in his bath and growl complaints at her until she can no longer smile—until she further angers him with tears? Or will his mood be equable? Will he respond to her sunny smiles and the sweet-zephyred nothings which she best knows how to whisper in his ear?

Amiable enough he looks. But then, amiability usually characterizes the sleep of this billowy sort of spouse. Subconsciously he must have heard her step, for he sighs, tosses restlessly, and flings up shapeless arms as though to enfold her.

Forgiveness flushes Day's cheeks, her finger-tips, her dainty toes. Forgiveness is the power by which, through the blisses and tribulations of æons of their marital state, she has remained his dearest love and inspiration. It has kept her face fresh as when, in their infancy, the Great Minister made them one. It has enabled her to forget his brutalities of yesterday, in the hope of kindness to-day.

Never comes a morn without much for them to do. For him there are ships to be tided from shore to shore, flying things of the air to be cradled when in need of rest, myriads of monsters and minnows to be fed, shells and pearls and corals to fashion in his spare time. She never rests from dawn to dark in her effort to keep the sky clear, that she may smile something of her own vitality into all living things under her eye, be they fishes of the sea, fowl of the air, or man from the various islands which so irritate her irascible consort.

All looks well for her now, unless——

An over-shoulder glance she casts about the horizon. There is an ominous look over there, a somewhat darker speck against the banks of grey. Are her arch enemies, the trio of fire-eyed Cyclops, planning interference with the mercies of her upper air?

No matter what portends, she must awaken her lord. Usually he scowls for hours should she be late about his call. Forcing a smile, she droops over him, until, with bride-like ardour, she kisses him on the lips. A moment his watery eyes gaze into hers. Then he gulps from pleasure at the desirable sight of her; lurches toward her; makes a clutch at her scant draperies.

But not for a moment does she allow herself to be caught to his moist, palpitant breast. Something immediate demands her attention. She makes excuse—some monster beetle without wings appearing from the direction of land. With sweet-soft adjurations that her lazy old Sea fall not again into a doze, she hurries to meet and greet the gleaming thing.

Nothing had Dolores seen of the dirigibles of Earth, save far-up glimpses of those which occasionally passed over New York. Now, with amaze, she noted the proportions of the air-liner which had intruded into the reflection of dawn at sea. In the wan light, it appeared to surpass the largest ocean steamship she had seen, and it held its course steadily, as though its blunt nose were cleaving waves of water, rather than of atmosphere. Through the slow rise of the sun an idea of its speed was given.

Silver-jacketed it was, cigar-shaped and massively concrete on its atmospheric track. Her credulity was taxed, however, to realize that this at which she gazed was no vision, such as that dreamed by Kipling in "The Night Mail," but a scene of the moment in the mortal world. Actual as though she were watching from some anchored ship near by were the colours of the wingless beetle and the vaguest tints of water and sky.

As the aluminium-painted envelope seemed about to pass

from sight across the rim of the prismatic pool, some shift of the reflecting machinery refound it and gave a closer view. The deck was shown, studded with cabins and protected by shields of glass. Although lacking the width of the modern ocean vessel, it was comfortably roomy, to judge by the steamer chairs being placed about for late-sleeping passengers. As an assurance that this was no cinematograph picture, the sailor figures engaged did not move about with the artificial speed which so often discounts the realism of the film, but with that deliberation and casualness peculiar to the life which is realer than "reel."

"Some jump from the day when they flew wooden kites over oil engines, isn't it?"

At Sin's question, the girl-shade glanced around into that map of malignity, his face. "Too wonderful almost to believe. In the air, truly, a man must feel like the monarch of all he surveys."

"Untruly, he *thinks* he is."

The interruption came from behind. Turning, they saw that His Majesty had entered the box. His frown suggested nerve tension, rather than ill temper. His voice was oiled with triumph over the demonstration of his most unique invention. Nevertheless the accented word of his comment aroused in Dolores the uneasiness which had kept pace with them through his personally conducted tour of Greater Gehenna.

Directly on seating himself, he reached for the telephone. "Don't waste all day on scenics. This is no travelogue. Get to the interiors!"

Tapping the box-rail so impatiently that sulphurous spots glowed from the points of contact, he watched the pool. Dolores and the iniquitous escort on her other side awaited with interest the result of his command.

Soon they were viewing a luxuriously appointed state-room. The full-length brass bedstead was occupied by a sleeping man. His up-thrown, silk-clad arm concealed the lower part of his face, but his forehead and back-tossed hair showed clearly.

"*John!*" The muffled exclamation escaped the girl-shade, half a sob, half a croon of joy.

A vaguer male figure became discernible, seated near the head of the bed. Leaning over the pillow, he whispered to the man. Although his outlines developed somewhat to the gaze, he continued to lack the clarity of other objects about the cabin, impressing one more as a creature of the spirit than of the flesh.

The sleeper seemed to feel this insinuating presence. He turned as if in troubled dreams; covered his ears with his hands; drew away so stressfully that his head bumped a bedpost. He awakened; dazedly looked about; glanced at his watch; decided to arise.

This evidently was a prefatory scene. There ensued an interval which Satan occupied with issuing detailed orders for the further manipulation of the great reflector. When the overgrown "blimp" again was mirrored in the pool, the lapse of time at once was manifest. Several passengers paced the deck, while below breakfast was under way. In the lee of one of the cabins, a woman, richly clad in furs, was being tucked into her chair by a fur-coated man wearing a plaid cap.

"D'Elie with Catherine!" exclaimed Dolores with resentment.

"And with John Cabot aboard. My latest in the infernal triangle," His Highness pointed pridefully. "Note that they have foregone all pretence of the love-making that used to engage them, these two who are agreed to exchange a title for a dot, when husband sees fit to dot the matrimonial dash."

Distress widened the spirit-girl's eyes. "But the sanctity of marriage—have they never a thought for that?"

"The sanctity of *what*?" He leered at Sin. "Our lady of many griefs to men to remind us of that! May she never lose her knack of amusing us!" He eyed her with an affectation of old-school sanctimony. "Alack my poor child, the sanctity of marriage *isn't*! Even if it were, these two wouldn't wish their future relationship hampered by such an obsolete notion. He looks to be gassing about the gas of the dirigible, from the way he's pointing above their heads. Manlike, he is probably trying to excite her admiration for his

knowledge of how it is filled with helium contained in bags of gold-beaters' skin. Helium, permit me to inform you, is an idea that earthlings borrowed from the Sun. It is supposed to be an incombustible gas. Notice that the French bounder is smoking an after-breakfast cigar."

"Is it really safe?" Anxiety quickened Dolores' voice.

"*Really?* Hast never been struck by the comparativeness of reality? Nothing is really real except eternal life, and that doesn't *sound* real."

Certainly Satan knew the value of pause. In silence he watched with them the shift of scene to where John Cabot, as alone as a celebrity can be in a crowd of sycophantic fellow-passengers, paced the deck. With John's eyes, their own lifted to the air-liner's Milky Way toward Europe, where a bank of clouds darkened the course.

"Now for something doing," remarked Sin to Dolores. "Take a bet with me. Will they beat the storm or the storm beat them?"

She, however, was intent on a repeated question: "You are sure, Your Lowness, that they are safe in trusting to helium?"

"It is safe to say that they *think* they are."

His reply was abstracted. After searching the scene intently, he turned again to the telephone. "I have keen long-distance eyes, trained to pierce the Plutonian shore, but I can't see a blurr of that imp Okeh. I must wireless him a reminder of where personal devils go that get too impersonal."

He spared an apology to Dolores. "Don't be hurt if I look a bit absent-minded at times. You are so unselfish that you won't, I am sure, when you remember how much other, if less fair, fiends, need an inspiriting thought from me."

As the pilot drove the great dirigible straight at the sky-scowl contesting its right of way, the winds hurled at it bank after bank of inky clouds. Huddled against the blasts behind the forward wind glass, the fifty or more passengers showed with as many variations their heirship to the flesh. The beautiful Mrs. Cabot could be seen loosing the hold

on her arm of her French suitor, and staggering across the deck to where her husband stood apart. Despite his concerned look, he tried to reassure her. All showed relief when the captain appeared among them, his little daughter by the hand, and laughed at the idea of danger. His gestures pointed the fact that the storm was passing well over their trig craft.

"Confident little monarchs of the air, eh?"

Satan's chuckle announced that his attention, too, was on the pool play. Before Dolores could formulate the plea commanded by her fears, he returned to the telephone with a curt command that increased her uneasiness.

"Now, Cyclops, blast them with a look! Strike at the heart of their conceit. Show them the noncombustibility of helium. Punish them for flaunting the control of the Prince of the Power of the Air! Strike—*strike!*"

He lurched back to the rail; with the interested minister and the dismayed girl-shade, he leaned far out that he might miss no resultant detail of the electric storm now due. Straightway, from out the tumbled mass of blackness flashed a three-forked streak of light. Directly at the great gas-bag it struck; with each prong of the fork it pierced the goldbeaters' skin. Next second, from three of the separated safety compartments, fluttered fiery flags.

Wounded, the great beetle strove on against the odds of flames, licking its envelope body with avid tongues. Soon the captain realized the futility of any race against time along the unmarked course of the upper air. The powerful engines stopped. The propellers ceased to revolve. The liner wavered in mid-air, as shown when the streamers of smoke ceased to trail out behind and gradually straightened toward the cloud bank.

No slightest move was made to fight the fire above. Evidently an order to abandon ship had been passed. Officers and crew busied themselves with such life-saving apparatus as had been provided against so unlikely a contingency. Gas was turned into the baby-blimps carried by the dirigible in lieu of life-boats. Outward they were swung.

On deck the hapless humans could be seen struggling

toward posts of vantage, fighting back their dearest and best, forgetting to pray in the panic of this conflagration, a thousand feet above the comparative safety of the sea. A refractory engine might have been coped with. An explosion of the hydrogen gas used in earlier ships of air would have been understood and the worst been over in one fatal blast. But this slow, gruesome bonfire of the helium on which they had relied, these æon-long minutes jeopardizing the primal, inalienable right——

The deck was beginning to sag. Two of the aerial lifeboats had been swung downward, loaded with women and the ship's only listed child—the captain's motherless daughter. Like bubbles, they were given to the mercies of the air.

The observation spread that there would not be room in the basket of the last baby-blimp for all who remained. An under-officer started to pass out the suits which were parachutes and life-preservers combined—suits calculated to lower one through a quarter-mile of atmosphere and provide support upon the surface of the sea.

Then came realization that there were not enough of the parachutes to go around. Self-first madness gained control. A battle for possession of the safety devices began.

The spirit-girl, watching this spectacle from the perspective of Gehenna, grew faint.

"Oh, I can't endure to look a moment more!"

Shuddering, she sank back from sight of the catastrophe. But she felt the hands torn from her eyes and heard a sword-sharp command.

"Can't? You've *got* to look to the end!"

The ferocity with which His Highness forced her to the rail ended in an anticipatory chuckle as he saw that the focus of the reflectors had narrowed upon the imperilled passengers.

There was Catherine Cabot, already equipped with a parachute, crowding forward to board the last of the blimp-boats. There was the Marquis d'Elie, checked in his callous struggle for a life-preserver and restrained in the grip of a couple of sailors by the captain's orders. There was John Cabot, standing to one side, calmer than the rest, despite the dread realiza-

tion on his face of the fact that there could not be escape for all.

A place had been saved for Catherine in the boat, so she did not need the parachute suit. John saw this and his face showed inner contention. If he was to stand back from the boat, should he not have the chance of that superfluous life-preserver? A moment longer he stood irresolute, confusedly brushing a hand across his forehead. As if to shut out some sinister suggestion, he turned up his ulster collar.

Perhaps the super-acute imaginations of the spirit-audience surpassed sight. Perhaps they actually saw an evil face lean to the ear of the mortal, and heard the voice of the millionaire's own of the personal devils that improve such moments to incite the worst in every man.

John's attempt to deny the disputation of fear and selfishness, although brief in point of time, was intense. While still in the throes, he saw that another had noted Catherine's needless double protection.

The Marquis d'Elie, abandoned by his guards, was rushing toward her, his object plain. His jaw hung lax as he reached and importuned her. His knees nearly failed him in the struggle to take the parachute by force.

Catherine with all her strength fought off the abject beggar who so recently had played the nobleman. Yet when, as almost he had conquered her, she saw her husband bearing down upon them, a retroactive impulse controlled her. So John, too, was after the saving suit? If she must give up the second chance of life, which she had meant to hold in reserve, it should not be to John!

When the banker engaged d'Elie the woman allied herself with the defence. No breath of the ignited helium was more fiery than the invective she spat at him who for so long had supplied her with the luxuries of life.

When she saw that his strength was likely to worst the pair of them, she suddenly drew out of the struggle and herself unfastened the contested parachute. As d'Elie was flung aside, she flung it to him. Turning swiftly, she then threw herself upon her husband and begged him to assist her into the overloaded baby-blimp, about to be cut away. Herself safe, she

saw his attempt to follow forcibly prevented by the pilot, and shrieked with mirthless spite. It would seem that in this hour when all loves were crowded out save that of self, hate was well remembered.

"Now watch the Cabot coward!"

His Majesty's sharp suggestion stabbed the spirit-girl's heart. She tried to turn from a sadder sight than the air-craft's consumption—the burning to ashes of her fondest ideal. Yet she might not turn; might not close her eyes. A control stronger than her own aversion was upon her. In trying not to look, she realized that she *must* look, even until the end.

The loudening laughter of the vast audience deadened her consciousness; it seemed to be at her, rather than at the spectacle that so diverted them. She sought to fortify herself. What though John did turn coward? The flesh was heir to the fear of death. At each apologetic thought, the mirth of the helliot crowd crackled louder. What could be happening on the doomed craft so to delight them? With a dread for the spiritual debasement of her loved one of Earth, greater than had been her own dread of physical death, she looked and looked.

The baby-blimp of last resource was lowering toward the doubtful safety of the surface of the sea. The pilot stood on the bridge, idle for the first time since the gas-bag had been struck. Evidently he expected to go down with his ship as had so many captains before him. John Cabot clung to the deck rail as if contemplating a suicidal plunge. Forward, the Marquis d'Elie stood equipped with the parachute suit won by Catherine's trick, but a lack of trust in it seemed to restrain him from the life-leap.

Too long he hesitated. John Cabot, maddened anew by sight of the Frenchman's superior chance, leaped the space between them; from behind he dragged him down on the blistering deck. There followed a brief struggle—an exchange of attacks, a roll *en masse*, and the separation of a knock-out blow from John. As his fingers loosened the last buckle of the safety suit, the craft gave a violent lurch. The foreigner's unconscious form, far heavier than air, was flung over the rail to a drop from which there could be no awakening.

As the air-liner straightened for the last time, John Cabot released the clutch that by a narrow margin had saved him from following d'Elie, and got to his feet. A glance at the blazing bag above, their one support, convinced him that seconds were precious. His eyes lowering, met the contemptuous gaze of the pilot.

The soul of Dolores shuddered with shame for the man she would have sworn to be brave. Then awoke in her that mothering, protective instinct which lives in women long after pride has been crucified. There still might be time to save John from himself. Remembrance of her own reluctance to turn on the jets that last evening on earth filled her heart with mercy. She would risk appeal to the Master Mind.

" I am sickened with this spectacle, sire. Human nature is strong, but not so strong as you. Show your power by throttling this Okeh devil, and conquering this mortal's mood. Come, I challenge you ! "

When she turned to enforce the argument she saw that His Highness had not heard. The visible of him was lurched back in his seat, enraged determination on the face, lips set in a snarl, fiend fingers clutching the high forehead. But that which had made him Prince of the Power of the Air—his dauntless determination—had gone from him.

Dolores did not need to be told what had happened. Impatient lest John Cabot's personal devil should fail, Satan had projected his own spirit to take in charge the mortal's fall. His will, not John's, had incited that struggle for the life-suit. He would accomplish his worst. The conviction moved her lips in a suppressed sob. Drawn by the ghoulish fascination that makes earthlings cling to the clay of their dead, she clung to the balustrade and strained her eyes towards the pool.

Death is the mortgage on life. John Cabot's revolt against payment showed in his face. Craven impulses clutched him. At his ear were the lips of the Master Insinuator. Facile fingers seemed to aid his with the parachute buckles. Yet he had seen himself in the pilot's contempt. He was putting up a fight. His life-long habit of self-respect was strong.

The pilot was father to a motherless child—a girl. He should be saved.

With the Thing which had attacked him—that fiend called Fear—John grappled. His knees shook, his jaw sagged, his eyes bulged from the fetid suggestions which, evidently, were gassing his will. If the pilot went down with the air-craft, he could never tell.

Dolores, too, shook with fear. She knew what John did not know—just who was opposing him. Indignation over the unequal struggle steadied her; cleared her thoughts. Why was all the power given to sin and none to rightness? By what method had the Foul Fiend projected his spirit to Earth to slay the courage of the man she would have suffered any death to save? Surely, what could be done for evil purposes could be done for good! Why was will given to woman if not to augment the will of man—why her mite of strength, if not to incite greater strength? John needed her.

From fear lest he should fail was born determination that he must win. He was a good and great man, John Cabot. He had lived aright and deserved so to die. The hate of Hell was not stronger than the love of her heart. What The Destroyer had done, she—John's saviour—must also do.

Moved beyond realization of the vastness between them, Dolores sprang to her feet and sounded into the upper spaces the vibrant chord of inspiration:

"*John, be love-worthy!*"

Regardless of the astonished stares directed her way, she saw in the mercurized pool that he bent his head as if listening—that his lips moved. She seized the telephone which Satan had used in communicating with the control platform. To the voice that answered she commanded:

"Get a record of what he said—I *must* know what he said!"

Lifted out of herself by her success, she leaned over the balustrade and willed that he should win.

And as she waited, the battle on deck was fought to its finish. Self-mastered, John brushed from his ears the insinuations that had tempted him; controlled the fingers fumbling

with the buckles; turned back the feet struggling toward the rail.

As the helium from the last compartments waved skyward the flames of the dirigible's final support, he stripped off the life-saving jacket and forced it upon the pilot. His insistence was clearly in the name of that girl-child who would be orphaned, should her father desert her for a scruple. He urged his protesting fellow-human to the rail; helped him over-side. In magnificent calm he watched the silken folds of the parachute spread open under their burden and begin a gentle, oceanward descent.

As the gas-bag disintegrated, bits of burning embers became detached and dropped like spent rockets to the waves. John Cabot, left alone on the deck, stood ready for the end.

Meanwhile, his last utterance, demanded by her who had inspired him, was given to the vast throng through the annunciators connected with the master telephonograph. Deep, strong, triumphant, its first syllable silenced the orchestral Song of the Sea. A cry of victory, it shamed demon laughter and tortured the souls of the lost with regrets over the god-great powers they might have come to wield had they but won their fights. A requiem that rang through the crusts of two worlds was its single word:

"*Dolores!*"

Exactly how she made her descent from the royal box and reached the edge of the pool, the girl-shade never knew. The sound of John's voice had moved her with but one wish—to join him.

He had, then, heard her cry—had answered her! So near he seemed to her that she could not endure to be so far from him.

Aspen-eager, she leaned far over the edge of the great bowl that held the mercury. But all she saw was the reflection of her own face. The dirigible must have gone sputtering into the sea while she was making her descent. Her lover must have met his mortal fate. The pool had finished its story.

So compelling had been the realism of its reflected scenes that she was still controlled by the emotion they had aroused.

She felt lured almost beyond the strength of her intelligence to throw herself into the brilliant depths—to be clasped as she might have been in that real sea in beloved arms. So low she bent that her whisper rippled the surface.

"John . . . *John.*"

A satirical voice, even more than the clutch of withered hands, drew her back to the "now" of Gehenna. The minister had followed her and was blinking at her, a trace of responsilibity mapped on the parchment of his face.

"Another second and Sin himself couldn't have saved you to Hell," he exclaimed. "Don't you know that this swimming pool is bottomless? Are you trying to hang one of those griefs of yours on me?"

His reproach was a revelation to the girl. Even Old Original! Never, perhaps, had she felt more puzzled to meet overture of male. But she was spared reply. The aggressiveness slackened from his form. A look of craft wiped the reproach from his face. He stepped behind her.

Explanation came in the approach of The Tempter. His spirit, then, had returned from its projection to Earth to the shell of him left in the box. Impulsively she hurried to meet him. She had no consideration to spare for his chagrin over having failed in his personal attempt. Too exalted in pride was she to give thought to the effect on him of pride's fall. Forward she stretched both hands, as if for the congratulation of a friend.

"That favour I asked of you—I've granted it to myself!" she exclaimed. "There is no need for me to go to him—he will come now to me."

She felt her fingers caught in a cruel grasp. Her joy-dewed glance was scorched by his malevolence.

Back drew the sneering lips over white, fang-like teeth. "You really think he'll draw a ticket down here—that hero? Fool, you have too much faith in the judgments of men!"

With repression more ominous than any outburst could have been, he turned on his heel.

"Come home," he said.

As has so many a submissive woman-soul before her, Dolores

tried to hide within her heart her blissful expectation. But she trod on air as she followed out of the stadium.

Splendidly John had gone through the formality of lifting the mortgage contracted at his birth—that debt of life put upon all, which may be paid only in the coinage of death.

Soon, now, he would come to her.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was " afterward." There could be no doubt of that. His Highness, so far as Dolores was concerned, had retired into one of his silences. He must be enraged with her for her interference in the pool play. But for what could he be waiting ?

True, the concession for which she had offered to pay any price was no longer an issue. There was no need now for her to be put in spirit connection with Earth, even had she not discovered that her own concentrated will could accomplish the projection—that the dead might return to their quondam surroundings, ruling and being ruled through senses stronger far than physical. Could she sooner have realized this one of the strange laws which governed her present state of existence, what heart-hurts of foreboding and regret she might have spared John and herself !

Not for an hour of the days and nights since the failure of that " Greatest Show " had she forgotten that the time set for her own answer as to her fate was approaching. On this afternoon—the sixth of those allotted " seven days of disgrace " —she felt herself no nearer decision than before the end of her séances.

She tried not to dread. Dread shrivelled the soul ; would mar her progress. And she was determined now to progress, despite her sentence to Gehenna. Hope was the immortal soul of love. Once John had joined her, no law of the lowlands could kill their hope.

So the girl-shade was happy in her deplorable state, as she never had been happy when the gateway of the mortal world

had opened to her youthful tread. He whom she loved loved her. That was the lyric of her song of the soul. Deep-chording into the accompaniment was her absolute knowledge of his worthiness. Expectancy played a running obligato through each measure, with here and there a trill of errant joy. He was coming, John; must by now be nearing the end of that long, drear journey from Earth to Shadow Land.

Every hour helped now. From far away, whispers of the altruistic philosophy she had taught young Jack Cabot penetrated her moods. How better prepare for the eventualities of to-morrow than by good cheer to-day? Since all the to-morrows must come disguised as to-days, she would make the best of the here and now.

A bit advanced were such ideas for the shell-pink ear of her infant, yet to the wee-shade she murmured them this late afternoon while out for a stroll. Although Adeline accompanied her, she herself carried the spirit-child, to save the maid's pride.

Their practice had been to take their evening walks through the Garden of Bad Luck. To-day, for the first time, Dolores chose the Avenue of Locusts, which led from the palace direct to the Limbian Gates. The ex-great lady protested against walking beside her mistress, even when ordered to do so, on the plea that she must work out her term of degradation. The young mother's hopeful adjurations to the instinct-fretted babe seemed only to increase her bitterness.

How could m'lady benefit, Adeline demanded in French, even though her lover did come through the gates that even-tide? Her own husband's pretence to care for her was only the last-lingering impulse of self-protection. He was assuming the virtue of constancy though he had it not. But he would rue the attempt, since he was insulting, not only her intelligence but that of the Mind Prince as well. M'lady must remember the rule of the realm; must clear her mind of the heresy of earthly ideals, lest they become known and she punished therefor. She would be saved a shock could she but realize beforehand that the lover she had loved would hate her even as she him. In Gehenna he and she, who had caused each other's fall, would be, indeed, bad met.

"See yonder warehouse beyond the wall?" Adeline pointed out a low structure. "There is checked all such superfluous baggage as love. Only hate may be brought within."

Dolores wondered that so small a building could store the lingering loves of the Hadean hordes. Before she could comment, there came to them from the entrance of the wireless station just inside the gate a high shriek rent by a deeper staccato of laughter. Down the steps and directly into her path came rolling what looked like an oversized football. Close followed His Evil Majesty himself. In one hand he waved a knout with snapping lashes. The laughter was his, and more cruel than his instrument of torture.

After handing over her babe to Adeline and commanding a quick retreat, Dolores hurried towards the ball, which was unwinding as it rolled. Its arms, legs and head proved to belong to a male *manes*, terrified beyond coherency. By the time Satan reached them with knout upraised, she had pushed the wretch behind her and started him after the noble-maid. Beyond a stinging of her consciousness, she did not feel the blow that fell. Almost at once she recovered; and was able to face His Highness with calm inquiry.

"What has he done to deserve this attack?"

"*Done?*" Satan's voice crackled as had the whip. "Shouldn't the chief inter-world operator know better than to retail me bad tidings? Out of my way—I'm highly charged!"

"No." Dolores stood firm.

"You'd rather I'd experiment on you?"

"Yes."

"Best look out, unless you want to be blinded until Judgment."

She was able to disregard the Boss Bully's warning by centering her mind upon her great happiness. *He had been love-worthy, John.*

"You can't strike me blind," she retorted.

Into the confidence of the purple-black eyes uplifted to his, Satan scowled.

"You'd not be blind. You'd only think you were because I say so, and my mind is stronger than yours. Everything is

a thought down here, as you must have learned ere this—just a bad thought." With the lash in mid-air he added: "But, thank me, you can't kill a bad thought."

As her hair was lifting to the magnet of the knout, he dropped it. The respite, however, was not for mercy's sake.

"You didn't change expression. You don't cringe. Why?"

"Pain is a coward's thought. I know that you, Augustness, cannot hurt me."

Interestedly he contemplated her, and this, her first open defiance. "You're smarter than I thought. You have a certain regardlessness that is the next best thing to conscious power."

"I have," she said, "faith that——"

"*Faith?*" he jeered. "Then I have it, too—faith that I'll do my damnedest. I cannot hurt you physically, no. But I hold a record for hurting minds that may cause you to reconsider."

"Not while I believe that all will be well with me." The voice of her contention sounded like the balmy winds of spring, to which nor man nor devil may say nay.

Perhaps her glance toward the gates suggested the source of her beatitude. Perhaps he sensed it from his own irritation. He passed her point to level one of his own.

"Has this belief absolutely padded your senses against the fact that I am displeased with you, she-fool? Don't worry. I never let personal prejudice interfere with The Cause. This faith-theory is valuable with the reverse English put on it. As a science, it has done considerable harm to the religions of the world. I've been waiting until your week was up. Why not have it now—your answer?"

"My answer to—to——"

"To my indecent proposition that you organize the vice of womanhood. Are you going to take that Low Priestess job?"

"I have until to-morrow to decide."

"True. And you hope meantime that your love-hound will come barking at our Avernian door. Oh, don't deny it! Why else should you be hanging 'round the gates? Why else should I?"

"But you said that the judgments of men would never send a hero here."

Stooping to recover his electric lash, Satan used it to punctuate his reply. "I'm hoping against hope, just as you are. If only he should be sent this way—*ah*! My latest wireless from Earth, however, leads me to fear not. The newspapers are headlined with his heroism. Imbecile earthlings are going to erect a memorial to him. And, would you believe it, that hunting parson of yours has used your friend's death as a stepping-stone out of the muddle-puddle of his ecclesiastical disrepute? With Cabot as his text, he preached to thousands in Central Park, exampling himself through the viciously attacked philanthropist, who, although proved guilty of weakness of the flesh, rose to the moral strength of a god in an emergency. Get the idea? His plea is for all men who have been dragged down by women. Should not he know that Cabot was too greatly tried, since the same she-devil ruined him with his Church? You recognize the allusion? The prayers he sent up for the soul of his fellow-victim were indirectly for himself. As a result he is to head the new Church of the Broad-Minded. Could you beat it—or him?"

At her consternation, he chuckled enjoyably.

"How the people of Earth like to cheat themselves! But you look fogged. Is your faith getting cured? Care to come into the receiving room and sit while you wait? I left some unfinished business."

As they mounted the steps of the stone-like structure, he added a mental lash to her punishment.

"You remember, of course, the lawyer who lost Mrs. Cabot's divorce case? Last you saw of him, in 'The Turn Turtle,' he was being thrown out of his profession for malpractising that delicate art called 'double-crossing.' The timely birth of your ill-begot, with fatherhood pinned on John Cabot by Seff's testimony and the guilty admission of your suicide, was a-plenty and to spare to ruin Rufus Holt. But along comes that judge you tricked, Roscoe Strang, of the good-sport tie. He has Holt's case reopened, and carries through a daring example of man-to-man friendliness."

From his belt he took the paper-like slip on which wireless messages were sent down by Gehennan operators.

" Let's see just what he testified, this brotherly judge. Oh yes ; ' The accused did bring the Trent girl to me, but solely in order to let me judge of her guilt. She looked so pure that I was not convinced, and stood, as I stand now, on my right to judge. If fault there was, that fault was mine.' After that, there was nothing for the Bar Association to do but open their arms to the brother they had misjudged."

" I am glad," Dolores said. " For a time I blamed Rufus Holt for my sufferings. But he tried to be a true friend to John."

" I dare say," sneered Satan as he opened the station door, " and made a mess of it, as true friends usually do. At that, you've got a good start with him, and can use him in our new campaign."

Within, an operator wearing a receiving head-dress, sat among his instruments. Beside a window which commanded a view of the entrance, His Highness placed a chair for her.

" The gates will open soon," he advised. " Watch the new arrivals trickle in and call me in case you catch sight of your John. I am pardonably impatient to meet him."

To sink into the chair was a relief. At sight of the preparations outside which the pigmy ushers were making for the reception of the evening's recruits, Dolores' mental pulse accelerated. She strove for the strong thoughts which lately had sustained her, and tried to keep out of her expression the pinch of hope long deferred.

" Are these likenesses, sweet Grief ? "

Turning, she found Satan at her elbow, offering her half a dozen sepia-like photographs. She took them ; looked at them, and exclaimed :

" John—*wonderful* ! And this is Catherine at her best. How splendid of dear Clarke Shayle ! Rufus Holt, too. Have you had them made for me ? But why include these of Vincent Seff and Dr. Willard ? I'd rather forget them."

" Does the murderer forget the features of the slain ? Nay, fair assassin, you won't need this collection for your dressing-table to remember your victims. These are stills selected

from our stock of life-films. I am glad you pronounce them such good likenesses, for I'm sending them up to old Mors of the Mystery Gate to hang in his rogues' gallery."

"To Mors?"

Satan nodded. "I mean to put a stop-order on the lot, in case any of them come through ticketed to Elysium. I need their kind down here."

"But I thought it was written in the tome called Judgments of Men where shades should spend the time until the Call," she puzzled. "Doesn't each one enter his new estate as he left the old? Must not his Earth record hold?"

His Highness frowned at the reminder. "Just because a rule never has been broken is no reason why it never will be. I may try, mayn't I? Queer if I can't frighten Mors into making a few exceptions." He turned to the operator. "Get the old ghoul. I want a word with him."

The connection was soon made. Ensued a brief exchange, but one so vehement that the operator cautioned his master to calm down, lest he blow out all the fuses about the place.

"There is one of them I must have, old-timer," Satan continued less offensively. "John Cabot by name and physiognomy. Likely to come through this very night. . . . *What*. . . . What for, in the name of Hell? . . . Gallantry on Earth, eh? . . . Death, you're a choicer fool than your sister Birth!"

As he banged the receiver on its hook, Dolores arose.

"John has gone on—up into Elysium?" Her voice was more faint from surprise than his had been strong. "He won't—come down—this way?"

At the nod which His Highness spared her from his rage, she crossed the room, went out of the door and down the steps. She was well along the path when he caught up with and stopped her.

"A word to the unwise," said he. "To be without a job is an embarrassing situation anywhere—particularly so down here. Your fancy position as First Royal Entertainer has come to an end. You'll do well to take on the next best thing that offers, lest your ability become discredited. I really believe you're the ablest she-devil ever given a chance to work

out her own damnation. You have unique powers, but there is no personal power that cannot be destroyed. And I am the Destroyer."

"This position you offer is so—is very difficult," the girl-soul protested.

"Isn't everything worth while difficult? And you are very clever, although in ways that may be used for or against you. On Earth you failed, just as badly managed talent often fails. Here I, the Boss Producer of a play called Sin, stand ready to star you in a success such as you, with your present limitations, cannot conceive. Already you know something of me——"

Dolores interrupted, although haltingly. "I know that you are—that you, too, are difficult."

"At least that." He bowed, as if thanking her. "Since it confuses you to consider me, pray consider yourself. It is plain that you've been, like myself, wrong since birth. Count the men you've ruined, every one of whom turned to good works after your influence was removed. Think of what you did—the first earth-law for women that you broke. What you've needed is a manager just a shade worse-minded than yourself. Now you're offered one, and a chance such as no vampire of Earth or Hell ever aspired to. It is a position fitted to the applicant, as your employment-agency friend, *née* Shinn, would say. What more ambitious rôle could you find than arousing the worst, not in one, but in all the men controlled by women in the world?"

She drew her arm from his detaining clutch. "I have, you know, until——"

"Very well, I'll wait. But mind you, there'll be no extension of time. Yes or no, and Hell help you if it be no! I want to get you started, so that I can give my own energies to the incipient race riots in America. Great field for trouble! All the wealth of the world is there, with the basest traitors cast out of other countries to misuse it. Go home, since you must have that last day of disgrace. But be ready with your answer to-morrow."

Like well-aimed shot, the syllables riddled Dolores' brain. A wounded doe, she hurried on her way to cover.

To-morrow.

That night while she lay bleeding of her heart wound, Dolores roused to the perception of an unaccustomed metallic sound. She realized that, for some time, she had been hearing it. Tap, tap, *tap*—it now increased in peremptoriness. Some one must be trying to attract her attention from outside the window.

She sat up among her pillows of satin sheen. By the sulphuric glow of the night-light, she saw that it was after one o'clock, three long hours since Adeline had tiptoed out.

After one, and *to-morrow*——

The face of the sardonyx-like clock seemed to grin back at her in anticipation of the seventh—said to be the perfect day. "The faith of fools—the faith of fools!" it ticked away.

Until she knew that John was not to join her, she had failed to appreciate how greatly she had been relying upon his assistance and advice. To choose between His Majesty's diabolic assignment and the ingenious torments to which she and her babe would be subjected, became the more impossible the longer she considered.

Were she what she once had been, expectant of the best because all-ignorant of the worst, she would have decided, without a moment's hesitation, upon what she knew to be right. But knowledge was weakening. Constant association with sin and suffering wore away the best intentions. To struggle against fore-assured failure, until the negligent hopes of Gehenna changed to fear, and fear changed to despair——

She covered her eyes from the suggestive leer of the clock-face and sank back into the veil of her crêpe-black hair.

"Amor . . . Innocentia . . . Where are you?"

Tap! *Tap!*

As though in answer to her stifled sob of loneliness, the metallic sound was repeated on the pane. Could they be without, the comrades of her youth, come to console her even before she called? Into *peignoir* and mules she hurried; crossed the room; threw wide the casement.

"Who is it? Who is there?"

"Sh—hush!"

In the answering rasp sounded neither the lilt of Innocentia nor the fearlessness of the love-lad Amor. From out the deep shadows that hugged the palace wall limped the lately promoted General Cummings. More spectral than seemed consistent with his brief lapse from mortality he looked, as he crossed the sill. From his once tranquil eyes shone the hell-haunted look of the archaics. His kindly old face was stretched and blanched.

"What has happened to you, Corporal Sam?" Dolores' tones sounded her distress at the change in him.

Before replying he drew the window hangings and dimmed the night-lamp. "No one must discover that I'm here. They say that His Highness knows everything that goes on in the palace, but I have risked it. You seem the only chance of saving us."

From the edge of the bed, Dolores focused her amazement upon the doughty soldier-soul. "Saving you—from what?"

"From his Great Intention." Old Sam's voice shivered into a whisper. "You don't understand? I've heard that even the prime minister is not in his confidence. But I hoped that you had wormed it out of him. Since I understood, I haven't rested day nor night, although there's little I can do. You have no idea what a hold he's got on those fight-fiends. I don't want to hurt your feelings, miss, that is to say ma'am, but from the reports of your séances you've turned some mighty powerful mortal minds topsy-turvy. For your own sake, for the sake of God Himself—wouldn't you be willing to try?"

"To try just what?"

"That's what I'm telling you." Stiff from apprehension, the old *manes*' lips formed clumsily to his revelation. "His Lowness aims to march into the Fields before Judgment, conquer the Elysiumites, and hurl the Great-I-Am from His throne. Don't you understand yet? *He aims to set himself on high as God-of-all!*"

"Oh, but he can't do that! How *could* he conquer God?"

"You wouldn't be so sure could you see how those hordes take to training. Every decent impulse is drilled out of them. The kind of frightfulness he's planning makes a lately mortal brain reel. Ma'am, I calculate that he's going to win."

"No! The Great-I-Am would not let him."

At the girl-shade's vehemence the old soul waggled his head, in his eyes the shadow of horrors that might not be forgot.

"You've seen wrong conquer right on Earth, or you wouldn't be here. I've lost all hope unless—— From what I hear I wasn't so far off about his having a weakness for you. In camp every officer has his joke about the modern Delilah that's destroying the Destroyer. All Gehenna is talking over his neglect of affairs of state to amuse you with shows and such. Not once of late has he been to the sham battles that he used to review daily."

"I am afraid you overrate——"

"Pardon me, ma'am, but that's the best. The worst can't be overrated. You see, they call him the Hope of Hell. His hold on the hordes is that, if they drive on to victory in the great offensive, they win eternal release. They fight for themselves, not him. If they lose, they'll be the first cast into the bottomless pit for ever and ever, amen. If they win, he'll give them rank and estates in the new autocracy of universal, everlasting, licensed crime. I don't fear for myself so much. I and even you might sink low enough to get by without exciting suspicion that we're unsympathetic. It's the Elysiumites that are going to suffer. Miss, can't you imagine what a Satanic victory would mean to a gentle spirit like——"

To hide his emotion, Old Sam covered his face with both hands.

"My Mary Gertrude never was mistreated in her life. But I wouldn't put it past these helliot hordes to——"

Dolores shuddered. "The damned to be the masters, and the blessed their slaves?"

"You begin to understand. Isn't there some one up there that you feel grateful to—some one you'd hate to see——"

"My mother died to give me life," the spirit-girl breathed. "And my father must be with her. He's not down here. Intemperance, you know, is considered a disease, not a crime, in the eyes of men. Then there's little Jack Cabot. He seemed really to trust every word I told him about his reward if he did what was right. I couldn't bear to see poor, crippled Jack——"

General Sam nodded. "It comes home, doesn't it, ma'am, when you think of those you love?"

"*Love?*" With the word, Dolores threw up her head. Into the veteran's pale eyes her dark ones gloomed. "Already the King hates the one I love. If Satan should come into this limitless power, what torments he would devise for the great soul of John Cabot!"

A sound startled them. The soldier-shade hobbled towards the window by which he had entered, motioning her to follow. Before opening the shutter, he whispered:

"I'd best go. I dare not come again and there's no way I can help you. You'll have to make up your own mind what to do. Only remember that there isn't much time. He's nigh about ready to strike. God A'mighty give you wisdom, ma'am."

He had wrung her hand. Almost was he over the sill, when a blinding flash struck at him from out the drab-dim night. Not a sound escaped him. Not so much as a clutch at the air stayed his fall. His right hand was raised to his cap in his old-time salute; then backward he fell upon the floor.

When Dolores' eyes had recovered from their momentary confusion, she saw His Majesty standing just without. His pleased look reminded her of the fearing wretch she had saved from a like attack yesterday. Only the hope born of her happiness had defeated his power to hurt her. Although not happy now, she was far from despair. Should he turn next on her, only faith could save her. She *must* believe that, despite appearances on Earth and in Shadow Land, good was stronger than evil.

He stepped aside, the King; glanced at the procumbent figure; smiled his attractive smile.

"Damme if one can count upon the taste feminine!"

This cynicism he addressed to the double of himself that showed in the nearest mercurized pier-panel of her chamber. For a moment he contemplated the dim reflection of his splendid proportions, the clean-cut features of his infernally youthful face, and the perfection of his evening attire.

"Is no age or fraction of he-man safe from you?" he commented. "So *this* is why he always pleaded your cause, why I

caught him *rendezvousing* with you in the garden, why he talked me down? These shallow-looking folk, forsooth, are he deep ones."

"Your Lowness"—Dolores approached him with blaze-indignant eyes—"surely you do not assume that I or General Sam——"

"I never assume. I know the worst. That's my power. I ought to be disgusted with you, yet——" He considered her face almost as interestedly as he had his own. The charm of his smile increased. "I've often noticed that men never get disgusted with the lady in the case. But I'll make a horrible example of that broken-winged old moth, lured here by your light, for the benefit of other mashers. Have to protect your promiscuous stamp of vamp from the outside."

That he was angrier than he sounded was suggested by the snap of his fingers toward the window. Into the chamber sprang a pair of the palace guards.

"Nerve shock—*boomeranged*." Laconically His Highness gestured toward the soldier-soul. "Lay him out in the Revival Room. See that you handle him gently until I advise you what particular form his mistreatment is to take. I must work out something specially effective."

He followed to the casement, as the stalwarts carried out the victim of his inviolate will. There he turned, as though chancing to remember the recipient of the two nocturnal calls.

"Miss or madame, I wish you good morrow. As your—ah—friend was saying at the moment of my interruption, remember that there isn't much time. Think things over."

Dolores took the repeated advice. Through the long, vague hours of the Avernian dawn she did think things over; thought and thought.

His Highness said that she had power. Indeed, she must have power, else she could not have flouted, even in small ways, his mastery. But hers was not the power for sin which he ascribed to her. Long ago a brilliant lawyer had toasted it as "truth." Before that she herself had called it "sincerity." She knew before trying that she should fail at the task of rousing the worst in women, when their best had been her Earth-life ideal.

Since nothing in all the universe was meant to be wasted—not a throb of heart or thought of mind—why had she been given power, only to lose it in the chaos of disappointment into which she had sunk after realizing that John Cabot was not to come to her, that the sentences for the same crime in man and in woman were not necessarily the same? She had been anticipating Hell. Although the time before That Day might be short, she might yet earn progression; perhaps might go to John, since he had not come to her. Suppose she had the right with every man to draw upon the exhaustless supply of strength which they claimed was God—— Suppose she could possess more and still more of this power of sincerity——

Stronger than the gleams of the uprising electric sun grew her determination; brighter her hope; more real her faith. The Rex of Reversals did not know everything, else he would have realized ere this that he could not conquer her. And he *had* some sort of weakness for her. Otherwise he'd have crushed her long ago. In the present emergency she would seem to yield to him. She would match power against power, wit against wit, subtlety against subtlety. She would take the case of the women of the world, but take it, as had Rufus Holt that of Cabot *versus* Cabot, in order to lose. By stress of her own emotion, she had learned that only spiritual strength was necessary to communicate with Earth. That discovery should not be wasted. Over the official wireless through the days would she command evils. In the night-time, with only her own yearning soul as sending station, and the souls of Earth's sad women as receivers, she would counter-command.

Perhaps the time would be shorter than General Cummings feared, or His Majesty hoped. Perhaps the Call would sound before he found her out. And if she was insincere toward her enemy, it would be that she might be the more sincere toward her friends. A judge of Earth had absolved her of guilt at first sight, because he saw in her face that her motive had been innocent. Surely the Great Judge would be as keen.

As for the unspeakable thing known, without being known

as The Great Intention, that also she might delay and divert. On Earth she had been called a menace to men. If wiles enough remained at her command, now that she needed them to save rather than to destroy herself—if the value of her favours did not decrease with deliberate use of them—she soon would have the soldier messenger set free. With or without him, however, she would find ways to weaken the King's hold upon his military. While Satan was giving the whole of his intelligence to inciting riot among the mixed races of her own America, she would be sowing schism among the condemned who had been drafted and branded into the Hadean armies.

The truth ought to be spreading propaganda. With what little she could disseminate on Earth, and the much she must begin at once to spread in Gehenna——

Adeline's tap on her door announced that what couldn't happen had happened—that she had caught up with the elusive to-morrow. But sufficient unto the seventh day was the enlightenment thereof.

Dolores was ready at last with her answer.

CHAPTER XXV

SOFT as the light shed from Beyond, a breeze blew over the inner fields of Elysium. Soft also was the whispered gratitude of the olive trees and palms; soft the smiles of the flowers of lilies and of Lebanon, of celestial roses, of amorant and of rustling immortelles. The ribbon-like stream that bounded the emerald velvet skirts of the meadow-land fluttered from the buoyant breath.

Of the trees, only a spruce atop a near-by knoll failed to sway. Too heavy was it with birds. Although its branches down-hung dejectedly, from its tip waved skyward a tuneful panegyric. So full was the chorus, it seemed that every songster must be voicing a heart full of joy. Yet one there was that did not sing, a yellow, strongly visible atom of immortality perched upon a low-swung twig.

His head was perked to one side. His round, quick eyes

were fixed on the glittering hazes that hung, like veils of silver-mesh veiling countless finer veils of golden threads, before the Source of Light. He was looking and listening. An excited chirp escaped him. With the motions of a bird unused to the exercise of his wings, he half hopped, half flew from his branch to the sward, and started with what speed he might across the greening pastures.

One spiritualized to follow the hope of so small a shade would have seen turning back from a company of spirits, then advancing into the radiant distances, the form of a child—a boy-soul of some nine years. With an odd, slithering sort of walk, he retraced his steps. Now and then he would stop, and, shading his eyes, would peer in the direction of the Mystery Gate. He, too, appeared to be listening and looking.

Although Jack Cabot still limped, he had out-progressed any pain of consciousness over his deformity. Knowing that except for the imperfect union of his parents, he would have been born perfect in love, he believed that the visible of him would be straightened at his second birth. Adjudged an innocent offspring of righteousness, he had been unhampered by the curse of the world; indeed, he had been given the benefit of every doubt. His movements had gained freedom and his features had beautified. On closer view, however, his expression appeared to be disconsolate. His sigh was repeated in that of another back-gazing *manes* whom he passed.

"Don't you belong to anybody, too?" Jack asked him. "Mors told me I was assigned to bliss. I walk so much easier now, and I know that I ought to go on. But, oh, I am so lonely!"

"I know. I know!" muttered the stranger-shade. "It is hard to be blissful alone."

At this moment Jack espied the tiny yellow creature fluttering toward him. An eager chirp started him toward it, at first hesitantly, then as fast as he could go. Thus met the two passionate spirits which had been caged together on Earth —the one passionate in his resentment, the other in the determination, instinct, or whatsoever may be called the will of a bird, to teach the joy of life.

In his hurry, Jack stumbled and fell, both hands outstretched. Into them flew the yellow mite; twittered ecstatically, billing the boyish lips that quivered into sobs and laughter.

"You look like—you *are*! Oh, Dick, you flew into the Light after me? You have been hunting for me? I'm ashamed of the way I used to treat you, Dickie. But you understand now, don't you, that it was only because I didn't 'preciate that there's a heart in every living thing, sometimes the biggest in the littlest? I had my eyes so set on a dog that I didn't see how precious you were! I wonder if the gold-fish liked me, too? It means something when a boy's bird will die to follow him. I'm ashamed, Dick. Honest, I'm awful ashamed."

The canary's response was a burst of song such as he had not sung when sitting upon the spruce tree, bereft of companionship although in the company of so many of his kind. Perched upon the boy-shade's shoulder, he revealed his secret in sound. Higher and freer and more poignantly sweet than ever fluted songster of Earth, he gave out on the Elysian air the theme of selfless love.

Inspirited, Jack continued on his return over the fields. He walked evenly, so that he might not dislodge his pet. And he chatted appreciatively in the intervals of the song, to atone for his unappreciative past.

"There are all sorts of musicians as you go nearer the Light, they tell me. There are pipers and harpers and trumpeters, and countless choir-singers that almost make you long to die again for joy. But I'll bet there's none will sing so sweet as you, Dick. Once I'm satisfied to go on, I'll take you with me, and give you the chance you never had on Earth."

By now the two were well over the crest of the stream-skirted knoll. Towards them, from the direction of the gate, spirits fluttered like leaves in a wind. Voices called out through the spaces—glad cries of greeting and wails of disappointment worn weak from repetition.

As before, Jack shielded his eyes with one hand and peered about. And, as he peered, he vented a cry that was the

aggregate of all certitude. His left hand he lifted to guard the bird, then he started down the hill.

From out the nether hazes a man-shade came climbing toward them—that he had lately arrived from Earth was shown in the anxiety of his dark, strong face. When he saw who was shuffling toward him and recognized the excited, childish voice hailing him, he increased his pace. When they met, father and son:

"Greetings, John Cabot!"

"Jack Cabot, greetings!"

The large and small hands gripped.

"I had a feeling that you were due," explained the boy, conquering the first incoherency of his delight. "I guess Dick must have felt the same way. Did you hear him sing as we came over the hill? Oh, John, I'm so glad you've come! This is a wonderful place to be happy in—but you can't be happy alone. I've come back ever so often, hoping that you or——"

"Then you haven't seen her yet?"

"You mean?" For a moment the child-soul stared up at his father's emotionful face. He stood on tiptoe to whisper his interpretation, lest the joy-jealous zephyrs should snatch it away. "Not her—not *'Lores*!"

"She came a month since. I am sure she would have been on the look-out for you, Jack. Strange that you have not met."

"Maybe——" Jack shuddered. "It's an awful journey over. Maybe she got so afraid of the snakes and the owls and the wild asses——"

"There's no stopping along the highway, son. Every soul survives the dread of death, they tell me. In reality, the transition between the two phases of existence is brief. At the gate they told me that she had passed through, but they refused so much as a hint at the direction she had taken. I've covered the border fields thoroughly since I came, and had concluded that she must have found you and gone on."

His concern lowered like a shadow to Jack's face. "It don't seem like 'Lores to forget me. I'd never give up trying to find her."

"She may not have known that I was on the way." John appeared to be advising himself. "But she did seem so close to me that morning above the sea. Her voice sounded so clear—so near. I was sure she had called me. If I could hear her with ears of clay, it seems as though she—— I tried to answer her. I wonder——"

Neither father nor son had noticed two small clouds which had appeared on the horizon line above the nether world. Mere fluttering specks at first, they had developed colour and form in a rapid approach. They settled upon the sward and hurried forward. He in advance was of upstanding form, his face beautiful and ardent, despite its lines of care. By one hand he led a fair girl-spirit whose head hung as if from shame, and whose eyes, on close approach, seemed to brim with tears. Boldly enough the youth lined up before the two Cabots.

"I am Amor and this is Innocentia. You know us well, although on Earth you could not see us. In a way we belong to you as well as to our dear Dolores."

"Dolores?" John snatched at the name. "You can tell us where she is?"

"Let me prepare you," replied Amor in pity. "I owe my life to you, John Cabot. I was, in fact, born of your heart-beats that day you first saw her in Seff's shop. Not consciously—of course mortals realize only the half of what they do—you sent me to her side to guide her. I have done what I could. But earthlings have no care for love. They never think to spare it until after it is dead."

The shy girl-spirit was moved by her comrade's self-depreciation to speak. "Amor has been splendid. He was close beside her when she heard the news that you had been sent to the Fields. He proposed our search for you, and he held me up with sheer strength when I felt that I must swoon from exhaustion. Always he has tried to protect me even as—as you."

"As I?" John asked.

"Don't you recognize me yet?" She brushed the moisture from her eyes and lifted them to his, twin blue anemones. "I am what you loved best in your love. Although you

could not see me as now, you knew that I was there. You held me dearer than her beauty, than her youth—yes, even than her passion for you."

"In mercy's name, don't taunt me!" John's voice was a sort of groan. "I did value you. I tried to save you from myself. God knows how hard I tried. It seems incredible to me now that I should have torn you from her—trampled on you——"

"Trampled on me? You never did that." Her timidity conquered by sight of his suffering, Innocentia touched his arm. "Not for one minute was I really afraid of you. A great love, such as yours, could not harm me. Amor often told me that. I stayed close to her on Earth and crossed with her into Shadow Land."

"Even down there we've been with her most of the time," Amor added.

"*Down there?*" Startled out of his shame, John Cabot peered into the care-worn faces of the guardian pair. "You mean—she is assigned——"

He read the answer in their distressed, averted looks. His mind was quickly made.

"Lead on—and down!"

"But, John"—young Jack clung tight to one of the knotted fists that hung at his father's side—"you can't go into Gehenna. You and I are assigned to the Fields. It is a rule here that we can go on, but never back."

"Go on—without her?" John laughed in a short, hard way. "There is no right in a rule that assigns me to Elysium and her to Gehenna. I'll find a way to prove that one man feels responsible for a woman's fall. Son, I am going to bring her back with me."

"If you could, John—if only you could!" Afraid, yet brave to believe in the power of his god of Earth, the boy-soul gazed into his father's face. "You'll look for me, John, first thing when you come back? A little way on there are bowers and villas that the shades build to live in while their eyes and minds are getting used to the Light. They leave them empty for anyone to take when they're ready to progress nearer the Source. You'll know the one I'm in if you

listen to hear Dick sing. I'll be waiting for you and—and *her*, John Cabot."

"Jack Cabot, until we meet again!"

In time the boy had remembered his lameness, so did not plead to go along. The best way to expedite his hero's return was to let him proceed unencumbered. Striving for courage, he watched the tall form follow Amor and Innocentia across the fields. A twitter reminded him that he was not entirely deprived. Gulping back his disappointment, he declared manfully:

"We'll get a nice place ready for her, Dick—my Other-Mother. He says that he'll bring her back, so we know that he will. John can do anything. It *will* be fun being happy!"

Across the mystery wastes that lie between the mortal world and Shadow Land looms a redoubtable wall. Through its gateway any from Earth may pass at will. But none may return.

Just within, the two head ushers slumped upon their bench and gazed over the familiar scene. The well-worn inward path soon divided, its lower half to drop over a declivity, whence it sloped "easily" into Avernus, its upper to wind away and away until lost in that incalculably distant glow.

"Queer set this," remarked the first usher.

"Queer is right—or wrong," replied his fellow. "I'd like to know, for instance, what makes that Light."

"I, too. Can't be either sun or moon, because it never sets."

The chief's eyes were fixed on a verdant slope, from whose hazes a female figure sped with apprehensive manner toward the base of the wall. He shrugged on seeing a unit of the boundary patrol return her into the Fields, but gently, with never a threat of spear.

"One of the yearning mothers, I suppose. Strange how they're possessed to slip back to their children!"

"Children who likely aren't wasting a worry on them," the associate sighed. "Why won't mothers let bad enough alone?"

A wail like the lament of a lost zephyr drew their attention to the rim.

"That fool woman in love trying to descend again," the second usher continued to grumble. "She's not the first who's insisted that she'd rather be in Hell with him than in Heaven without. Quaint, isn't it, considering that we don't have any trouble with men in vice-versa cases?"

"Hi, guardsmen! You asleep? What's wrong over there?"

With his cry, the chief sprang up and hurried toward the down path. Ahead of him ran the spear-carrier whom he had called to task. Behind came his fellow.

From the brume of the upper distances a group of three spirits had emerged and were rushing downward, regardless of the shade patrol. Through the array of spears levelled against them they darted, as though impervious to wounds or fear.

On the rock-strewn cliff the reinforcements found themselves facing an aroused man-*manes* whose like they never had seen. Clothed in an armour of light was John Cabot, "his eyes as lamps of fire . . . and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude."

"What matter the judgments of men, after man's little day is done? Make way. I am going through."

"Drive him back," commanded the chief usher. "All together now!"

Against the row of levelled spear points, John hurled himself.

"Right is might and I am right," he cried.

"You can't pit one will against hundreds and win," the chief contended. "Stop a second. Realize how foolish——"

"What is folly but a riotous expenditure of will?" At his application of the memory flash, John laughed. "This is—to will—and to have—my will," he panted, as he fought the united determination to stay him. "You witness the end—of my social ideas—my immoderate desires—my excesses—my pleasures that—have ended—in death. A laugh for—your hundreds—of wills!"

Perhaps by his rashness, perhaps by force of the wind now rousing in strength from over the Fields, the light forms of

Amor and Innocentia were snatched up and borne through the ranks of the guard. At sight of their disappearance into the abyss, John's eyes blazed like lit torches.

"Since mind is more than matter up here—since this is a world of will—let the stronger will prevail!"

From the grasp of the nearest of the patrol, he wrenched a torch-lit spear. Waving it on high, he rushed their resistance; engaged them; smote their thoughts with his thoughts. The two ushers fell back, powerless to contend against him.

"He must be a madman," gasped the chief.

"Or a god!" muttered his associate.

Both shook in the greatening gale. Both paled to see that the mystery Light, which had abided since their entrance into Shadow Land, was being eclipsed by Stygian clouds. So dark grew the air that they scarcely could discern the form of the man-*manes* outlined against the rim. But his battle-cry came back to them.

"*Make way—make way for my mind!*"

Into the thunders that rocked the clouds merged his voice. Lightnings lit his victory. Madman or god, he plunged over the rim.

CHAPTER XXVI

EARLY as she dared that forenoon, Dolores had sought audience with the King. From calculation new to her, she had arrayed herself to please him. Ceding the mauves and dove greys that seemed best to express her, she had selected one of the court creations designed for her by the master electrician of His Highness's own robes—an effect as of dawn-tinted tulles weighted by a tunic sewn over with rose rubies. Her hair she had wrapped about her head like a splendid coronet. To the handle of the jasper-like staff, to be carried with the costume, she had fastened the tiny dynamo of a full-blown, scarlet rose, and in the ribbon of one silver sandal, just over the high-arched instep, had tied a closed, pearl-dewed bud. Upon Adeline's verdict of "Exquisite,

madame!" she had studied the mercury lest any possibility of further effect had been neglected. The reflection was of a woman-soul, young, fresh, hopeful as the early morn, yet already aglow from the red realizations of her noon-day.

His Majesty received her alone in the throne-room. Among fulsome compliments he interspersed his gratification that she had not awaited a summons from him.

Dolores was more surprised by this affability than she would have been by any new truculence. For the first moments she found herself overcome by what she had prepared to overcome in him—indignation.

"Then you did not really suspect me last night?"

He lifted a protesting hand. "You wouldn't deprive me of that pleasure? Can't you conceive how much rivals are enjoyed by the admirer who need have no fear?" He descended the dais to substantiate the claim in the mirror.

After he had placed the prime minister's chair for her, she gave him her answer. She would accept the office of Low Priestess.

At the quiet pronouncement, a gleam lit the steel of his eyes.

"I am glad," said he. "Sooner or later—probably sooner *than* later—I should have made you accept it. However, it is gratifying that you have done so, shall we say, *near*-voluntarily? You make me hope that——"

He bent his head and looked into her face. Soon he finished in the smooth voice of a hierophant expounding his doctrine.

"You make me hope several things of you. From your viewpoint I ought to despise you for last night's discovery that your vamping mania has consumed a soldier from my ranks, doddering enough to be your grandfather."

"You are too intelligent to believe that," she flashed.

"Nice work for an earthly audience. But it's not to your interest to convince me. I am too delighted to find you worse than you at times appear. Did you notice down in the world that the virtuous women keep the devotion of their men? I guess not! One difference between me and male earthlings is that I own up to a depravity which they are taught from

birth to deny. The worse I think you, the longer you're likely to hold me. Pray let me dream on!"

"To hold—*you*?"

Something of sincerity in his voice forced the query. Instantly she regretted it.

"That *naïveté* is your cleverest trick," he approved. "You probably guessed long before I did my—ah—dishonourable intentions. Since you ask, I don't mind declaring them here and now."

"Oh no, not now—not here!"

With the protest she got to her feet and turned toward the door. But she was stopped by the compelling look of him.

"Why should I be willing to invest you with a power equal almost to my own? Am I likely to overlook how much more deadly is the female than the male—how much faster you will grow in sin than I have done, once you are well started? Should I risk your attempting to overthrow me by not making our interests one?"

She did not answer his questions. And she asked none other. She stood, perforce, waiting to hear that of which instinct had warned her all along.

He began again in different vein. "I've been mighty lonely down here these last few thousand years. You see, I've never been appreciated or understood. The moment I saw you that terrible Tuesday—or was it a tragic Thursday?—I appreciated that you were different. To have the sympathy and approval of a woman-soul like you——" He interrupted with a laugh at himself. "But there, I'll leave that 'lonely,' 'misunderstood' old plea for the husbands of the world to tell to other men's wives. The truth is, you have convinced me that I've missed a whole lot. Much as I despise weaknesses, I have come to feel that *one* would be a luxury. Dolores, I want to love you."

"But I don't want you to." She stepped back from him.

"And I want you," he continued imperturbably, "to want to love me. I could have made you do so long ago, just as your hypnotic osteopath could have done, but I'd not be satisfied with that brand. Come, give the devil his due!"

All she gave him was silence. He watched her while continuing.

"In the close relationship which I propose, you'll have greater opportunity to quip my curiosity and compel my admiration. Should I tire of you, our community of interests will bind me to you much as earthlings are bound in that state called—— Fairest fiend, I ask you to become my queen."

"*No!*"

Dolores was dismayed beyond all discretion. She tried to throw off the clutch which he laid upon her arm.

"You'd be wiser to conceal your aversion," he advised. "You are going to accept me whether you wish to or not, just as you have accepted the office of Low Priestess. In both cases the answer was settled before the proposition was put. And it is a fair proposition, this last. I am positively anxious to care for you as much as I can—more, if anything, than I intend to make you care for me. 'He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.' Don't you see? I have acknowledged my wish for one weakness, in order to give you every chance for graceful consent. With me it is now or never. I feel that you are the one woman-shade who can teach me—well, what I wish to know. But you won't get a second chance. The Great-I-Am is a softy to give man a second chance in the Redemption. I shall not be soft regarding you."

As still she spoke no word, he urged more stressfully:

"Have you no ambition that you scorn the queenship of the Universe? That's what my offer means. I have taken none into the secret of my Great Intention. And until I feel that we are one in spirit as in state, I shall not fully confide in you. But I'll say that the day of my deliverance is close at hand. Soon my supremacy shall be established from everlasting to everlasting. Ruthlessness shall rule before the time of the end. How long, do you suppose, can He stand who is self-acknowledged to be all this weakness called love, against the Hate, which I am?"

This question he blazed into her eyes, now uplifted to the demand of his.

"Little fool, how dare you hesitate? Consider what you are and who I am—your smallness and my greatness. Consider Eternity. Hell is my home-land. I have conquered Earth. High Heaven only is left to gain. The time is near when the Castling from Paradise shall return unto his own. Judgment shall be damned on that day. I shall be Jehovah. The Day—*The Day!*"

In an ecstasy of egoism, he caught the spirit-girl by the shoulders, willed her up the steps and into his great carved chair.

"Sit you in the seat of the mighty," he ordered. "Learn the sensation of gracing a throne. Queen of three worlds—*my* queen—accept the salute of your most abject slave!"

Sinking to one knee, he lowered his lips to her bare ankle. The spot they pressed stung as though from nettles, then turned redder than the rose-bud tied against her instep.

"I am a suppliant, Queen Dolores—I who never was a suppliant before." His lips increased in ardour through the contact. "I need you. I want you. But I want you to acknowledge the need of me. Always have I jeered at mortal men who plead for favour. I don't know what's come over me. I could take you and make you and break you all in one flash of my will. Yet—I ask you, Dolores. I *ask* you."

The spirit-girl realized that the time had come for her to speak, but she could not force her tongue. Gone was her self-reliance of the early dawn. She had come prepared, but not for this. Overwhelmed she felt by his declaration as she had not been by his threats.

The sensation was familiar; it recalled those days of uncertainty in the Cabot home when she had been tried by the evasive ways of John. Then her fear had been for him, and, through him, for herself. Now he and she were included only as infinitesimal atoms in the universal disaster that impended.

Look high as Heaven, look low as Hell, she was afraid.

"How dark it is growing!" She shuddered.

"Is it so dark that you cannot see that I am on my knees, still asking you?"

"How can you ask me, when you know where my heart belongs?"

His lips lifted over his fang-like teeth, in sudden reversion to type. "No heart that I want can belong anywhere else," he snarled. "You have seen that mongrel lover of yours turn yellow with cowardice."

"I have seen him," she corrected, "conquer cowardice."

"We won't quibble. The obstinacy of the female heart is more often a fault than a virtue. Open your mind to conviction. Can you imagine me feeling cowardice? I've tried to give you an idea of how bad I am. At least I have shown enough inherent evil to awaken some slight admiration."

"But our standards are very different, Your Lowness. I don't admire this ruthlessness of which you boast. The sensations from love and hate are very much alike, they say. Isn't it possible that you are mistaken in the absolutism of your wickedness? Don't you suppose that you are capable of a pulse-beat of mercy for one who——"

The flash of lightning that shivered through the thickening gloom of the great room seemed to illuminate her broken query with significance. The answering rumble of thunder was no less menacing than his reply.

"This is heresy. You weaken your capacity for sin with every such thought. Good as you are, I'll make you in time as bad as I am. As the queen-consort you shall become the wickedest thought of my mind, the most vicious desire of my soul. Deadlier than death, you shall give and keep giving life to my love. Undying love—that would be a delicate morsel, would it not, little gourmet of the hearts of men?"

"All real love is undying," she maintained.

Her eyes held on the distant curtain. Its alternating electric stripes were writhing like snakes, as if tormented by a wind stronger than its dynamo.

"At least, passion is not. Undying passion—that would be something new—even to you, eh? Do you remember, siren, my mention of an 'experiment'?"

Dolores, at the look that was lapping her face, shrank back into the throne-chair. At the burn of his hands as they pressed her outline from waist to shoulders, a scream broke from control. But even as she was impelled forward and down, her terror became exorcized by the lure in the look of

him. That most destructive of all forces—the brute force of evil thought—bent her knees, loosened her clutch of the chair-arms, drew downward her face. Almost had her lips met his in a loathing, yet longing soul-caress——

The semi-gloom was lit by many kilowatts of light. The curtain was torn apart. From the entrance door a tall man-spirit fought his way, a cursing demon pack surrounding him. To his legs clung the dwarfs of the Gehennan gate. Lightnings from the storm without followed him, as steel slivers follow a magnet. Dishevelled, wild of eye from the fury of his fight, unannounced and undeterred, he forced his way to the dais steps.

"At last—*John!*"

Sad from the very intensity of her gladness rang the tones of Dolores' salutation. At sight of her beloved she had found herself, had broken the evil spell put upon her, had risen from the throne. She stood with hands outstretched, a visualization of that composite called a woman's heart. Ethereal as the fabric of her gown shone her face and forehead. Rose red as the mesh of rubies that girdled her glowed her lips. And from the deep purple of her eyes all mystery cleared—a royal revelation.

But John Cabot did not accept the invitation of her hands. He did not ascend the steps. In silence he returned her gaze. In his ears still rang the scream which had brought him strength to worst the hellion guards. His mind, hurt from the sobs of the love-lad and Innocentia, huddled in horror outside the door. His eyes saw only the picture hung before his entry of a lady downbent and a kneeling knight, their lips about to meet.

He lifted his regard to the magnificent figure looming negligently behind the throne-chair. Grey eyes met black, a soundless clash of iron and steel.

Satan snapped the pause. "So—you have joined us, after all?"

"Sir," said John, "you have the advantage over me."

"I have, indeed, as will develop on acquaintance. I believe you have already met the woman known as Grief to Men. Suppose you bow before the queen to be."

John's gaze returned to the prayer for forgiveness on Dolores' face. His leonine head leaned as if to hear the quiver of her lips. The great soul of him saw more than his eyes had seen. He granted the prayer, took the offered hand; bent before the spirit of the woman he had loved until his kiss swept her finger-tips.

"Dolores, I have come to you. On Earth I was too weak in flesh to show the strength of my regard for you. But you should not have distrusted and deserted me. Didn't you realize, from your own desolation, how hard it was for me to stay away?"

"Afterward I realized," she murmured. "Too late I knew."

"I was fighting your enemies, myself chief among them. I had determined to save your good name. It was ironical that the friend who tried to help me ruined both your life and mine. Had I known about the child, even though I could not have freed myself by law, I should have declared you my wife before the world—not as I'd have wished, but in a binding pact. Dolores, I have come to tell you——"

"So we observe," slashed His Majesty's sword-sharp voice. "Might I inquire just why you presume to come to this lady—you who have a perfectly bad wife on Earth?"

"I am divorced by death."

John continued to look only at her whose good faith was the *sine qua non* of his desire. She, he could see, was eager to hear him, despite her apparent fear of the Machiavellian presence. To her he spoke, low and rapidly.

"I found myself in a burning plane at sea. I seemed to hear your voice calling me from far away. But the short cut I tried to take to you has proved the longest way. When I learned that you had been assigned to Gehenna and I by special licence to the Fields, I went mad with rage. That you should be damned and I rewarded for the self-same crime was unspeakable! They could not drive me back. To be spiritually chained to earth would be bad enough, yet that would have a mortal limit. Even Mors does not seem to know the date of the Second Call. A century on Earth is

accounted only an hour here. To wait around in futile transitions from fear to hope—from hope to fear——"

"Why didn't you go on when you had a chance," Satan interposed, "on towards that nice place called Paradise?"

"Dolores, you are my Paradise—lost and regained, though not yet redeemed. I have come to redeem you."

"*Christ!*" Malice sounded close behind the Satanic sneer. "Just what is your claim, redeemer?"

At last John Cabot answered him directly. "I want justice for this woman-soul. I want it *now*. I demand that you release her."

"You *want*? *You* demand? You contend that she belongs to the Fields, she compared with whom the 'mother of harlots' was a saint in a niche?"

"You lie!"

At the suppressed fury of John's declaration, noxious fumes began to spread from the Belial glare.

"A strong word to use over a mere disparity in point of view. However, your compliment sounded genuine and I thank you. Sorry that your demand must be denied. Law of the land, you know."

"The best thing about most laws is that they can be broken," John asserted. "I cannot conceive of a great intellect that would not except this case, once it was explained. A woman who never had an unclean thought or an impulse that was not wholly kind, has been sent into Badlands, while each of those who contributed to her fall has been reinstated in the opinion of men. A shop vulture has made a virtue of his vulturing. An alleged man of God——"

"Don't go through the list," His Majesty objected, "I've had many a laugh over the choice assortment. Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief, rich-man, poor-man, beggar-man——"

"Thief?" John interrupted in his turn. "I am the thief. Yet even I, the most culpable of all, have 'come back' in the opinion of my fellows—have been rewarded as was everybody concerned in her ruin."

"Yes, even down to that delightful old woman who was so anxious to get her gas bill paid."

At the King's interjection, Dolores sank back into the

throne-chair. Against its high back he leaned for support in his loudening laughter.

John Cabot did not laugh. With each peal of Satan's mirth, his frown darkened.

"I am not afraid of you and your ridicule. If the double-standard rule is the law to which you refer—if that holds beyond the jurisdiction of Earth—then doubly do I intend to break it."

"*You* intend? Really, you are—too funny—funnier than all the rest!" His Majesty struggled for control of his risibilities. "Allow me to say that your visit, although something of a surprise to one who does not often have 'em, is not unwelcome. It is, in fact, almost too gratifying to be true. You're a bold, if not a bad man. I have need of your sort. Of course, you'll have to be born again. All good men must be regenerated down here."

"You don't intend, then"—Dolores half turned—"that he shall go back?"

"My poor child, do you expect me to flout the gift of Providence—even one sent down like this, C. O. D.? He has about as much chance of going back, this snuffed flame of yours, as you yourself."

Stiffening from his negligent pose, he seated himself upon one arm of the throne-chair and leaned over her confidentially.

"Mayhap you and I would have been even more companionable had you appreciated how much I, too, have longed for the coming of John Cabot. Perhaps it is foolish of me, but I find I'm just a bit jealous of your quondam lovers. I'd like to have them all down here, as a sort of safety valve when I get bad and mad. Having only John, I'd be less than inhuman to give up taking it out on him. Besides that great experiment on myself, there's a lesser one I wish to try out on you. Now, now, sweet Grief, don't worry! Nothing painful. Rather one whose success will bring you delight."

"Please to—tell me—what you mean?" faltered Dolores.

"I've noticed that when the only man a woman earthling ever really loved demises—shuffles quite beyond her reach, you know—she proceeds to love, as soon as she can locate him, the second only ever man. I'd like to demonstrate that

the rule holds down here. You wouldn't be true to type if you didn't have a lingering sort of affection for every one of your ex-onlies."

"But I don't see——"

"I make John die a second death before your eyes, in order that he may be regenerated unto sin. I crunch to dust the bones of his spirit. I tear to bits the sinews of his soul. When you see him an unrecognizable heap in the morgue of Gehenna, will you like me, do you suppose, more or less?"

At her failure to reply, he sauntered toward the nearest mirror, and there carefully adjusted his red cravat. Evidently reassured by the magnificence of his reflection, he added amiably enough:

"That Judge Strang was no more a sport than I am. He took a long chance on you after one short look. After the some few looks I've had, I'll take a longer one. What say you, fair fiend? Be a sport, too. Come, let's make it a bet!"

Her response was a worded moan. "Why, John—*why* did you come?"

For a moment His Majesty considered the drooping, dusk-crowned head.

"Evidently," he made remark to whom it might concern, "she doesn't consider mine a betting proposition."

As if suddenly aware of the hellion guard cluttering the great room, he amused himself by driving them back against the highly charged curtains.

John Cabot mounted the dais steps; removed the girl-soul's hands from her face; held them while he bent to look into her eyes.

"You are my mate," he said. "You have been tried—tempted, perhaps. But I believe in you. You swore once to believe in me. Do you remember? Come with me, Dolores. Let me fight your way up to the Fields as I fought mine down. Have courage to come."

"I'd only hold you back," she sighed.

"The harder the fight, the dearer the victory," he urged. "And we should be together. Does that mean nothing to you? Whatever your fate, I should feel honoured to share

it—to serve you through Eternity in atonement. Where faith lives there is love."

"Faith?" A rasping sob shook her—or was it a laugh? "Faith, Satan says, is the fear of fools."

"Faith is fear? I do not understand."

"Yes. Fools pretend faith because they fear. But nobody really believes in anything down here. Everybody fears—fears despair. He'll never let me go. You must leave me if you can. Lean low and listen. Later you'll understand."

She caught his arm, shaking like a reed with her whisper.

"God sacrificed His only begotten Son, they say, in order to save the world. You must sacrifice your hope of me in order to save——"

"*Damn you!*"

The curse was addressed to the King—the first Dolores had ever heard from the lips of John Cabot. Satan had approached soundlessly; and with his charged forefinger and thumb had flicked the intruder on the brow.

"Save your vitriol. I'm already damned," he answered, with consummate insolence.

John, blinking confusedly, straightened. The impulses of his late life still controlled him. With the flash of a puma's instinct, he leaped upon the First of Fiends.

CHAPTER XXVII

WRATH had burned the bonds of John Cabot's hard-learned constraint. A fury of resentment over the subjection of Dolores controlled him. Supernatural might to avenge and save her seemed to come to him. Yet sudden as was his leap, strong its impetus, that which was material of his adversary had side-stepped neatly, as though he were some mortal boxer in a squared circle.

"Positively, you annoy me," commented Satan, from the far end of the dais.

"You demon dog, your spite is nothing to my righteous rage!"

Again John rushed the blasphemer, with head lowered between his shoulders; seized and attempted to bear him down. But face forward he collapsed upon the steps. His will to kill was conquered by its own futility. Nothing—quite nothing was in his grasp. A chuckle caused his glance to lift. Near by stood the Tormentor as though untouched. An opaque aura surrounded him. Thick fumes spread with his breath.

Cabot staggered to his feet. All too soon the realization which Dolores had implored was being taught him. What matter how righteous the cause—how violent his will for avengement? This was Too-Late Land.

Satan clapped his hands; commanded the guard.

"Seize the fool. Throw him into the Den of the Demented. Get him into shape for particular torment. Out with him!"

"*Wait.*"

At Dolores' word the guardsmen halted their rush. John fixed his eyes upon the regal figure rising from the throne.

With her rose-adorned staff, upraised like the sceptre of the queen she had been declared, the girl-shade commanded silence. From her eyes, as from beacon candles behind dark panes, shone the light of determination. The time had come for her to test that early-morn resolve of matching her guile against that of His Satanic Majesty. The look she levelled upon him was too subtle for even his super-sense to define.

"Has Your Lowness duly considered?" she asked him. "You say that you never waste power. This shade has proved at least initiative."

"A powerful impudence, I call it, to break into our unhappy little home in this—ah—vehement manner and invite my intended, right before my eyes, to elope with him. He deserves the worst billet of the Hadean hordes."

"Granted, sire. But if you draft him, isn't he likely to distinguish himself among your conquering heroes? Is there not a warning in his show of fight?"

"Why a warning? What could he do?"

"They tell me that the hold you have on your military is in the princely rewards offered to your veterans. Has the

Great-I-Am Himself a better name for keeping His promises than you ? "

Crossing to him, Dolores met his combative look with an expression of affectionate concern.

" Don't you see that you would put yourself under obligation to advance one whom, quite naturally, you wish to depose ? Why not return him into the false security of Elysium ? After you have come into your own, he will be one of your captives of state. You will then have the privilege of wreaking your dislike on him as you see fit. Look on him as end-of-the-season fruit. Let him ripen."

" And be denied the taste of him now ? " Satan licked his lips. " Is this a trick, she-fiend, to wrest him from my clutch ? Have a care lest you, too, become disliked ! "

" I am not afraid of that." With a laugh that came strangely from her lips—luring, assured, golden—she plucked the rose-bud off her ankle, and, from tiptoe, flicked it against his cheek. While placing it in his button-hole, she added : " You brand your warriors. Wear my brand, the scarlet bud. You are mine, as I may be yours if only——" She drew away her laughing lips, just as, almost, he had accepted their challenge.

" Courtesan ! " he accused. " What has inspired you, all at once, with the best way to intrigue me—to make me doubt your truth and fear your artifice ? "

" Perhaps I have not wished to intrigue you, as you say, before. Perhaps my artifice has been in concealing myself. Ah, Pluto, that even you have not guessed my trickery ! I wished to wait until sure of my own mind. Yours is so dominant, it is hard to be sure. Since what you have said this morning, I am ready to stand revealed. You have aroused what you see in my eyes. You should be the last to doubt. This is myself. The other was all pose—my best asset on Earth."

" You are worse than I thought," he exulted. " I was beginning almost to believe in your decency, so consistently did you act. Then, after all, I am right ? "

Again she laughed, this time with him. " Aren't you always right, you perpetual wrong ? Of course there is no

right or wrong to what I'm asking you. Call it my caprice. I've done a great deal to please you. Do one thing for me."

"Make it something else, then."

"Something else is never what one wishes."

"But I suspect your request of being something more than a caprice."

"That even I cannot deceive you!" With the chagrined exclamation, she thrust her arm in his and drew him aside. Her head drooped, as if from embarrassment. In a low, hesitant voice, she confessed: "You are too keen for me. This request *does* matter to me. The truth is, I don't want my ex-only, as you call him, down here. Don't you know enough of woman's nature to appreciate how I feel? I can't help the way I was born. I *am* a harlot at heart. Sooner or later the bad habit of loving the old love might distract me from the new. You saw last night that any conquest has its charms for me. Why not——"

She paused, as if to contemplate a fresh idea. "I shall need concentration to satisfy Your Lowness' hopes of me, and concentration will come easier without the humblest of my ex-suitors to distract. General Cummings was a deserter on Earth, and, as you yourself said, once a deserter, always. Him, as well as John Cabot, you may treat with fuller effect after The Day. Why not send the old nuisance along? And there is one other of whom I should like to be rid."

"Who, pray, may this other be?"

"My babe."

Satan showed himself assailable by surprise. "Not the Littlest Devil? Now you have spoiled your argument. I can't believe——"

"You will when I explain. Ineffectual looking as is my child, she interferes with my whole-heartedness for evil. She rouses soft feelings in me—impulses to protect the weak and helpless. I find it hard to live down the thought of her. To see her daily is a detriment. Focus that imagination of yours, Pluto. Try to realize what you often must have heard, that mother-love is the most enduring influence in the universe."

"That's one thing I've never been—a mother. Wish I

had. I'd have given birth to some rare wastrels." He grinned at the thought.

"Don't you see my argument? You will grant the favour I ask? I dislike to plead as much as you do, but I make this a plea. Give me a chance in the one sincerity of my life."

"Your one sincerity?"

He bent low to catch her murmured reproach.

"That *you* should need to ask! I, too, feel that I have my one chance in you. If you are not strong enough to compel me——"

"One question." His fingers snapped like a bracelet around her wrist. "Why have you been at such pains to arouse my jealousy of this weakling whom now you seem to despise?"

Deliciously she smiled. "Ah, you humorists who cannot see the joke on yourselves! Once you said that I was humorous only in that I had no humour. Since then, you have taught me. Tell me, is not jealousy the rough stone that whets an edge of love on attraction?"

"I'd sort of hate to part with the Littlest Devil," His Highness tentated. "It has seemed almost like having a child of one's own in the palace. If she were a boy, I don't believe I could. Strange, that hankering in the heart of the worst of men and devils to reproduce himself in a son!"

He glanced up at his coat-of-arms, then back at her. The peculiar intensity of his look was unendurable. Her lids drooped over the consternation which she feared would show in her eyes. But she pressed her advantage.

"I'd like the babe to go along, for her sake as well as my own. Her crime was her parents'. You wouldn't fancy that third-to-fourth-generation rule if you'd ever had a child. Come, dear Devil, acknowledge that my reasons are good. Let me have my way this once. Afterward you may have——"

"Exactly what?"

She lifted her face, pale as a night flower, to the strong light of his gaze.

"There is a question between us," her lips murmured reminder. "You can compel me, but you want my consent.

You spoke just now of a sporting proposition. Very well, I'll make you a bet. This favour I ask you against——"

She could not control the shiver that seized her. The spit of fork-tongued lightnings excused the droop of her face. For a moment the growl of thunder silenced her voice.

"I can keep promises, too. This favour against—anything —you want—of me."

She had pledged—herself. Her two hands slipped within his, and clung, palm to palm. They and her voice shook with loathing which she prayed he might mistake for the tremors of love.

"Dear, *dear* Devil," she begged him.

His answer was in terms of action. He returned to the dais and seated himself in the throne-chair. He bade the guard unhand their prisoner, and sent the dwarfs to summon those whose release had been stipulated by the famed siren as her price. From a jewel-box he selected a fillet of pearls supporting a single, magnificent drop of light, red as a tear of blood. This he placed upon Dolores' night-black hair. It was, he made formal announcement, her betrothal crown.

Only John Cabot failed to salaam before the queen-elect. Straight to her he strode, bending so that only she might hear his suppressed appeal.

"Do you expect me to believe in your inconstancy?" he asked. "What force has crushed your courage, that you hesitate to trust your fate to me? Because I seemed to fail you on Earth, do you fear that I shall do so in this inter-world? Is there no voice in your heart to tell you how gladly I would have forfeited my passport to the Fields to spare you this profanation? They say that Shadow Land is only a waiting place. Wait with me, Dolores. Don't cast yourself too low for later recall."

The persistence of his faith both shamed and blessed the spirit-girl. Evidently he was struggling against the influence of mal-appearances. How could she have doubted such absolving love? For herself, surely her Hell was the there and the now. She must remember that his safety and that of the hapless atom born of their passion hung in the balance. Yet even him and their babe she must have sacrificed, if

necessary, for the greater issue. The fate of the Universe, which the Maker seemed to have forgotten, depended upon the treachery of her looks and speech.

So far her determination had proved as strong as desperate. What if victory were defeat? What if she slew this sturdy love of him she so longingly loved? The issue she must not—*dared* not forget. To protect the great heart of John Cabot from those thoughts of despair which, like ceaseless drops of water on a stone, in time must wear away his hope; to spare him who had defied the first law of Mystery Land the realization of his own futility in the Lane of Labours; to keep his forehead clean of that brand more significant than the brand of Cain—the hate-sign of the Hadean hordes; in saving him to send him as her messenger to warn the Earth-blest of the Castling's contemplated drive; through him to reach the ear of One said to be omnipotent and arouse Him from His lax protectorate——

Perhaps, if That Day was saved to righteousness, He would be told of her and how she had tried to do her part. As yesterday and to-day were so small a fraction of Eternity, with all life's reparations possible in the vast vacuum of to-morrow, justice might yet be meted to Dolores.

His Majesty, she knew, had attended each word of John's plea. A single fault in the play of her part, and her partial success would end in failure. Not long enough for one of his dart-like thoughts must she consider the soul-hurt to herself. She, whom so often he had twitted for her simplicity, had pitted her intelligence against the Master Mind. Far better not to have attempted the deceit if she did not deceive.

John she silenced with a mocking laugh. His amazement she answered with assumed contempt. His protest she cut short with ridicule.

"So you cannot progress for thought of me? Strange, when here in Gehenna I have out-progressed my *penchant* for you! Yet until to-day I did not realize how sleazy your form would look to me, or how weak would sound your mawkings. One's taste is best cultured by contrast."

Her glance toward the King was eloquent interpretation.

"Don't reproach me with my shamelessness, I beg of you," she anticipated him. "It is a point of pride with me. Away, you weary me! Let this convince you that my fancy for you died with my body."

She struck him with her jasper-like wand across the lips. At his low moan, the illusion of a red rose adorning its handle went out.

Dolores, realizing that the light of his love also must have been snuffed, could scarcely repress an echo of his protest against her cruelty. Lest she fail in the climax of her triumph, she turned from the sight of him, and sank into the prime minister's chair.

Her courage was reinforced when the dwarfs dragged Corporal Sam before the dais. The old soldier-soul's shaken state from only a few hours of "special treatment" accented the necessity of his immediate release.

In the parting with her babe Dolores felt free to indulge in more naturalness. She had confessed a weakness there, in the strength of her desire to overcome it. A moment she held the small shade in her arms. But the cling of little arms about her neck choked her with the necessity of untwining them. So trustful, so young, so blameless, to be consigned to punishment! The crush of desolation which pressed hard on her heart might best be lifted by the thought of a possible day when she might see her child again—see her with her trust, her youth, her blamelessness eternalized.

The precious salvage she consigned to John, with not a word of her heartful adjuration that he should be good to her, take care of her, teach her that her mother had loved her, even as she had him, her best beloved, far too well to have and to hold.

Nor did she risk the aside which she wished with soldier Sam, in which to urge him to trust all his dread knowledge to John Cabot. She felt sure, however, that he would do so of his own accord. Once in the Fields, his object would be her own in sending him. Gallant himself, he would soon recognize gallantry and would give his confidence to John.

The King was issuing orders. An adequate guard was to serve as escort to the Elysian boundary, taking a wide detour

to escape the shade patrol. The fact that such a transfer had never before been made need not concern them. The love-hound had blazed a trail from Elysium down. Let him blaze another from Gehenna up. They were to start at once.

Only John Cabot made his exit loathfully. After the others had preceded him through the light-riven curtain, he paused; turned. Dolores knew that to the last he hoped of her. A gesture, a whisper, a sigh, would have recalled him to full faith. He had meant what he said. Gladly would he have shared her fate until that dim-distant day when justice was to take the universe.

But she did not make the gesture, vent the whisper, breathe the sigh. Rather, she forced the false laugh which had stood her in such good stead, and turned, affecting to think him gone, to her Satanic suitor. Seductively she leaned, as if to consummate the caress which John's arrival had interrupted so short and yet so long a while before.

At the downward swish of the hangings, however, she drew back. The lilt of her laugh was lost in the realization that he who had come to find her had left her, lost. More moan than mirth it sounded at the thought that no lightning flash or whip of wind in the storm-ridden air outside could scourge him as had her treachery.

At her change of attitude, Satan sat back and watched her with unsmiling scrutiny.

"It is not too late to call them back, if you regret the terms of our wager. 'Anything'—wasn't that your pledge?"

"But I do not wish them back. I am glad—so glad to be rid of them."

"And I. You acknowledge that I have won the bet?"

"Yes, Your Lowness. You have—won."

Any show of triumph he subdued. Even that peculiarly calculating expression in his eyes, which before had dismayed her, was covered by a sort of veil.

"The first thing I want of you," said he quietly enough, "is your agreement that to-night shall be our nuptial night. I regret to dun a lady, yet I *don't* like I. O. U.'s. Shall you find it convenient to pay?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"And the sun became as sackcloth of hair and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a figtree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind; and the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled away; and every mountain and island was moved out of its place."

LONG ago, when first she had become an object of diabolic clemency, Dolores had supposed that, come a day, she was to pay a price. When, after all the public pomp and private pose of her regal rites, her new lord escorted her into the throne-room—— Not until he stretched his arm in pride-ful gesture toward the escutcheon over the dais—— Soul-sick, she realized then the sum and coinage of that price.

To her chamber through the late afternoon Adeline had brought reports of His Highness' proclamation of the royal alliance. Although he could not quiet the unprecedented storm which had raged since high-noon, and his electricians had failed utterly to swing the imitation sun low enough to send a single gleam through the clouds on this his wedding day, preparations had been rushed. To the farthest reaches of the kingdom great annunciators had blared the banns through the shriek of winds. Not a rookie of the Hadean hordes, not a wench of the Wantons' Well, not the most venomous whisperer of the Cage of In-Laws, but knew that the Belial Bachelor was to change his state.

The news was made gladsome by a decree for cessation of all punishment. For that eve the thought of despair was taboo. The most fearing of shades was to be allowed a breath of hope. Even in this clemency, however, the Rule of Reversals would hold, according to the noble-maid, since at daybreak of the morrow all torments were to be resumed in double force.

That Greater Gehenna should celebrate was not enough,

however, to satisfy His Majesty's festive mood. Earth must join in the rejoicing over his signal success in the most intricate of games, even though the mortal participants might not be told the cause of their debauch. Through free distribution of Devil's Dew, a negotiable, bottled quintessence of his own most iniquitous spirits, which had become a recent output of distilleries under his direct control, there was to be started that night a series of riots destined to belt the globe, a spree of all nations that must have mortified the ancient Bacchanalians, did wireless reports penetrate to their section of the Realm.

The ceremony had been brief and the guests few. Original Sin, looking particularly hypocritical in his crackling high-church robes, officiated. Although none there was to give away the spirit-bride, the lack was dismissed with the groom's remark that, thanks to his inside knowledge of how to force the female affections, she was her own free gift.

Perhaps never in all marriages of convenience on Earth had sounded so sacrilegious the transposed lines of the service.

Would Dolores take Satan to love, honour and obey, from everlasting to everlasting, until he himself did them part?

She would.

And would Satan do his damnedest to love and cherish Dolores?

Hell helping him, he would.

Almost before her change of estate could be realized, she who had been despised of men stood before the Lower World with a crown upon her head and a sceptre in her hand.

Her lord's first marital word had been a complaint. Why hadn't she worn the glittering amethystine costume which he had ordered as her bridal robe? Did she think herself still the shopgirl who had walked, once upon a time, into Vincent Seff's "slaughter of the innocents," that she should come to her nuptials unadorned by any of the stage jewellery which he had heaped upon her? Or had her late-learned humour dictated her dress of virgin white?

She suspected indulgence, if not actual approval, behind his show of displeasure. Himself he had arrayed faultlessly in cutaway effect. His two departures from Earth's accepted

mode lay in a scarlet cravat and his *boutonnière*. In lieu of the conventional orange-blossom bud, he wore a tiny illuminated nectarine.

As to so many women-souls before her, sacrificed upon the matrimonial altar, the subsequent feast was to Dolores a tedious affair. Toasted in varied high-volt mixtures, praised for her vices in the retroactive terms of the damned, applauded uproariously for her inability to make brazen reply as the arch-mistress of deceit, she had striven through course after course to keep up appearances. What though in the illusion of passion flowers that banked the board as a centrepiece she saw only the reproach in the dark eyes of John Cabot? What though her only taste from the adroit food-phantasies was the unsatisfying reminder that she must not regret her deception—must not allow herself to long for him, lest her thought-clutch deter him from the brave deeds that he must do? What though the only spirituous effect of the wine she quaffed was the realization that, with every half-hour now, the little party saved by her surrender must be nearer that boundary over which not even the Prince of the Power of the Air might recall them? With her black demi-watt she sipped the conviction that, in the emergency, she had done the best she could; with her electro-cordial frappé, the hope that already John might understand—that all might yet be well.

Now, with her gaze up-hung on the royal coat-of-arms, that conviction became as "sackcloth of hair" and the moon of her desire "as blood." The stars of her hope-heaven fell unto the Earth, "even as a figtree casteth her untimely figs when shaken by a mighty wind." All might yet be well? "As a scroll . . . when rolled away" was that sanguine possibility. Out of their places were moved her every mountain of resolve and island of faith.

She had declared herself ready to pay. Above was writ the price.

From out the design, as of ebony and amethyst, still shone the giant's crown in bas-relief. The names of Japheth, Shem and Ham continued to drip in ruby lights from the horns of their respective lines. The caption beneath blazed bril-

liantly through its sardonyx-thin lettering. Except for the omission of two words the text read as before. "SATAN THE FIRST AND LAST" had been cut to "SATAN THE FIRST."

That so bold an announcement could be made by elision! No longer did Satan the First boast himself the Last. Through what channels did his reasoning run?

"But—but——" Words at last came of her consternation. "I thought there could be no birth after the first death?"

Satan answered with guarded elation. "Some one you used to believe in proved to you to-day that laws were made to be broken. Surely I am the last whom that law of the first death could coerce—I who never have died."

"Nor were you born, Your Lowness. You say that you had no mother. Never have you been of the flesh, so how can you expect——"

"I am not to be classed with the flesh. I am a god," he interrupted. "Haven't there been children of other gods? Why, even the Great-I-Am had a son!"

Through a corridor of the palace he led her and into the private wing of whose magnificence she had often heard. Upon a divan, sheened over as with embroidered altar-cloth, he placed her; with one elbow crooked around the hump of her knee, he lolled at her feet; with a new possessorship he stroked her bare ankles, and, at times, her throat and cheeks. The while, he descanted in detail upon what he now revealed as his "experiment."

Only since meeting her had he foreseen a day when he should find irksome his seat on the throne, when affairs of state would bring him greater *ennui* than official sins *divertissement*. After The Day, when he had been acknowledged over all, and the Universe had been let loose in an unending administration of outlawry, would not he, as well as his aides, be entitled to some reward of vice? Why continue in a career of perpetual exertion after his utmost had been done? As though human nature could not be trusted to increase in evil of its own impetus, once punitive bars were laid! Should not he be freed to tread the path of dalliance—to realize some such gentle vices as he had seen to satisfy the doughtiest devils of Earth?

Desire for an heir-apparent to his throne had of late grown in him. Could she not imagine the outcome of his ambition—a youthful demon born to dominance, bred to brutality, schooled to undreamt possibilities of fiendishness? Strong as steel in mental culpability, he should have the "chance" denied his self-made sire. Never should he know, hence should not fear defeat. With a super-divine intolerance, he would accept and hold his sovereignty. Although of the spirit, he should inherit a talent for strong visibility, taking his form from his father, and from his mother a subtlety of appeal such as neither god nor man yet had possessed. A beauty of countenance irresistible should be his—features of marble, pale as the ghosts of Dolores' victims—lips that quivered from the very delicacy of the lies they lied, eyes that veiled in mists of mercy the utmost truculence.

Could she not see the child of his imagination? Let her open wide those crime-dark eyes of hers; to-night let his moth-like fancies bask in their purple flame.

When he, leaning against her, lifted himself to try his thought, the bride-soul clutched her forehead and shuddered back among the pillows as if to shield brain, as well as eyes. Yet even to her own ears her protest sounded both sincere and false.

"You must be mad—*mad*—to dream of such a thing."

Was not the inspiration of all dreams mere madness? he asked her. And was not that love which he aspired to feel the first symptom of mental derangement? As for love's climax—as for passion——

Always had he envied mortal men their carnal appetites. There was nothing in being the King of Evil if he couldn't have *all* the vices. For æons had he hankered to glut himself with food, and drink distorted images into his mind. Now he hankered—— Oh, by no means to weaken himself with this love over which she oh'd and ah'd! Really, though, didn't it seem too bad that he who had invented loveless lust and incited it daily in a million earthlings, should enjoy it only vicariously? Even before she had come to Shadow Land, he confessed, he had felt the need of a second-worst emotion. That night of the tale of her surrender to John

Cabot, he had decided on its nature. To think of the thousands of years he'd wasted! To have been the two ultimates, archangel and arch-fiend, without having been intermediate man!

As the lasciviousness of his look intensified, Dolores realized in herself a certain sympathy. Appalled by its drawing power, she reminded herself that only chaste aspirations might conquer the crave for evil to which all mankind is heir. Her lips formed to the names of her quondam guardian companions.

"Innocentia, I do not wish to know these dreadful things. Save me from the knowledge, dear, *dear* Amor."

His Majesty's chuckle sounded. They were gone for ever, the pet pests, he exulted. Ignorance should no longer be her bliss. Why shirk responsibility for the idea born of their acquaintance—one wickeder, therefore more seducing, than any he alone had conceived?

His further explication scorched her mind more hotly than did his breath her cheek. Physical desire he might not have. Yet was not its source, more than in the case of other passions, a state of mind? Irrefutable proof lay in the fact that desire wakened or slept as mortals fell in or out of love. Did not the city rake, accustomed to think of satisfaction as a necessity of his being, indulge it without love? And the libertine husband—why did he seek it from fresh subjects if not that his mind, wearied of his wife, must be freshly inspired?

With every tale told him by Dolores these past nights and nights, Satan had measured his mentality by that of each of her earthly Don Juans. Averse at first to the weakness of love, he had come to recognize it as the match which would fire his affections, thence his desire. When he considered the state of mind into which he could get through hate——

He had come to the acknowledgment that, without love, he had missed mightily. Now, he longed to strike the ineffectual-looking lucifer. Since, however, any outcome of their alliance must result, more than in mortal alliances, from a state of mind, he wished Dolores also to long for love. That was why he pleaded when he might compel. He could

not risk an heir warped in his evil nature as had been the Cabots' child in body. No toy pace-setter for the sins of Satan the Second!

She was the match to fire his imagination, he told her. She was the seemingly insipid drink which——

He interrupted himself to lick his lips. That fellow Seff was right. One needed a nectarine. She was his nectarine. She was very visible, as yet the most material of shades. The ways of the world still controlled her. Once his wishes were her own, she would of her own accord lift the stronger cup to his lips; would press the cheek of ripe fruit against his teeth. Already she had felt an impulse toward him. No use for her to deny that, in the throne-room that afternoon, just before they had been interrupted——

"No. *No.*" The very necessity of Dolores' denial, however, italicized in her consciousness the knowledge that she lied.

As Satan passed his hand under her arm and pressed her bust, she shrank from him with moaned aversion for the thought at the back of the caress. He *was* like Vincent Seff. The offence had been the shopman's on that first day so very long ago, when she had begun to learn of men. Then, as now, she had been speechless from apprehension. Had that apprehension come from subconscious knowledge of herself more than of the man?

On Earth she had lived down certain inherent tendencies because she had not understood. From His Highness' first touch she had trembled, even as on that day in Dr. Willard's study when she had implored the hunting parson to teach her the religion said to cover game like her from just such hunters as he. The carnality of mortals she had come to excuse because component of the flesh. Since, instead, it was shown to be component of the mind—since she was protected no longer by her innocence—since here in the inter-world she was hunted by the most expert of mental sportsmen——

Dolores strove for perspective. How ghoulish an ambition, this desire of Satan for desire! What could be more inhuman than a passion of the imagination without hope? Yet he hoped. *What* was his hope?

An odious thrill answered the question—a thrill which she knew to be the first farthing of the price she was to pay. The sum total, then, would be the development of her evil possibilities to the utter obliteration of the good. All that she had saved of her better self from her late estate was to be burned to dross by that recognized flicker of passion which had lit this conflagration. The King, by the heat of his diabolical imaginings, would kindle, then fan her with the winds of his swift thought. Her spiritual inflammability was her real value to him, as had been that of her body to men. He had praised, as had they, her beauty, her *naïveté*, her teasing silences, but he had passed without a glance others as exceptional as she. That worst of her which, in the physical, had wrecked her chances on Earth, would wreck those mental chances which she had hoped to realize in Shadow Land. Even though she saved The Day to the Great-I-Am, she would not by then be a fit subject for reward. Spiritually ruined, she would be no mate for John Cabot. Well it was that she had not known in time the fullness of the price, else might she have been too niggard-souled to contract to pay.

Forewarned in these premonitions of her fate, the spirit-girl felt, as never in the past, her own impotency. Innocentia gone, the love-lad Amor gone, her babe, gallant Old Sam, and now John—all who might have helped her she had sent beyond recall. Evil expectation was a compelling force ; that she had learned from Clarke Shayle. Even now, the Master Mind was compelling her—vehemently, evilly expecting of her. Would she give ?

" I am a perfectly free immoral agent," His Majesty boasted. " You believe that, don't you, my poor child ? I can seize your mind and hold it to the last split-second of Eternity, whether you will or no. You liked that molecule of suppressed power in your love-hound. Aren't you appealed to by the fact that I am at this moment suppressing all the molecules of power that have run the world ? "

Dolores felt shocked by several perceptions. He had licked his lips ; had called her " my child " ; had concentrated his magnetism upon her ; with deliberate intent, was attracting her through the same means used unintentionally by John

Cabot. As he argued, he bent upon her a smile no more youthful or friendly than that of the lawyer who had won her confidence, only to spoil John's life and her own. And he wore a scarlet tie.

He was, in his conversion of her to his will, like each one of those mortal men who had converted her. In one consummate personality he combined their characteristics. Every man was a part of him. He was all men.

Since detached integrals of himself had brought her irrevocably to grief on Earth, what chance had she to resist him as a whole ? Despite her guard, the despondent thought must have shown in her face.

" You do not need to answer in words." His Highness pressed the point. " The idea of rectitude, grafted on to women by convention, embarrasses you. Don't think of yielding to me. Think, rather, of yielding to your worse and greater self. You, so lately and so rarely physical, must share my mental hunger for the appetites. You will feed me with thoughts of fulfilment ? This passion that you have aroused in mortal males, since born of the mind, on the mind must have violent recoil. You will tell me—will teach me ? I shall not bore you. If the response of men diverted you, how much greater the diversion of a god's response ! Is it not an ambition worthy even of you—to inspire the passion of an immortal whose fervour has not been spent in birth or life or death ? Think of my tireless excesses, of my ingenuity, of my eternal crave for you ! Think of the procreative possibilities of a superman ! "

" You explained to me yourself," the girl-soul sobbed, " that nothing could be created in Gehenna—that down here it is always too late."

" It is never too late for me to do worse."

" But this heir you speak of—must he not come of a mother as well as a father ? I, at least, am subject to the rules that govern earthlings. I have been born of the flesh and I have died."

" You quibble." His frown showed irritation. " Aren't you lifted to my estate by our alliance ? What you were doesn't matter, except that your late mortality brings new

vigour to our line. What you are becomes merged in me. What you shall be——"

The hand that pressed up her arm and gripped her neck pricked as with many needles from his impatience. Her head he drew backward, as he rose to his knees on the couch and leaned over her. Her eyes dilated under the close gaze of his. Her lips moved to the syllables of his slow, low declaration.

"When the thought-lust in you has conquered your affectations—from the moment of the consummation of the union of our minds—you shall be a goddess—my goddess—for aye."

Strangely enough, his egotism did not offend her. An expression of power, it bade fair to convince her. Warning herself that she must not be convinced, she tried to slip from his grasp.

But he held her. "I'd love to love you, sweet Grief," he murmured close to her lips. "Ask me to kiss you, Dolores, as once you asked a man of Earth. Beg me to take you, you devil's desire. Let our moment of for-ever start *now*."

His reminder helped her to tear her will from his and throw it, like a tangible thing, to the thought of John. Pushing him away, she found voice to defy him.

"I'll never ask you. That moment can never start."

"Fair fiend, don't try me too far. I want to want you. I desire desire."

As his fingers closed around Dolores' throat, she was weakened by the thought of strangling. She could not speak, either to deny or implore.

"And you," he rasped, "shall want me to want you until you'll pray that your mind may burn to ash from its own ardour. Or will you teach me willingly—inspire me as you best know how? I prefer to be your lover—to miss not a nibble of that smooth cheek, my luscious nectarine. But I am also your legal lord. I have tutored too many legal lords of Earth in their brutalities to miss my divine right now. I am your master. Ask me to kiss you, slave."

Dolores strove for the sort of courage that had enabled her to repel him before. Just one strong, good thought might release her. From the least likely source—his clutch of her—

it came. Baby fingers had clung tight about her throat a few hours since. She was a mother, and a mother was enslaved only by her motherhood. She freed herself of his grip; struggled to her feet; started across the room.

"My wager did not include wants of my own," she defied him. "You have asked more than I can pay."

"More? I haven't begun to ask!"

From the closeness of his voice she realized without glancing back that he was following. The strength of her good thought was scattered by panic. All she could do was to flee.

She hurried to the windows, but found them shuttered against the storm. Behind object after object of the room she took a stand, only to desert it on his near approach.

He, like an evil fate, leisurely, sure to overtake, pursued. He laughed from excess of exhilaration when the inevitable occurred. Her long tulle-like veil caught about the winged foot of an illusion of Mercury. As though by jealousy of the speed god she was tripped, was about to fall. Satan caught her.

"Why did you have to stop? This has been *wonderful*—never could be so wonderful again! Whatever inspired you with the knowledge that the best way to ask is to deny?"

Freeing the veil, he wrapped it around and around her, binding her hands to her sides.

"Your intuition is keener than all my keenness," he panted. "Of course the fleeing woman is the woman one must overtake. To ask me, you have aroused me to ask you. Your lips, Dolores—I ask your lips."

He flung her down; knotted the ends of the scarf about her sandals; crowded over her. The lecherous look of him silenced any protest. His eyes were aflame, and from his whole person fumed that ruddy effluvium which came of his concentration.

As measured by the slow approach of his face to hers, a death-time of dreading thoughts preoccupied Dolores. Fragile as were her bonds, she could not throw them off. Her resistance, she knew, was weakening. Suppose her mind consented; what then?

Repeatedly had he forced her to his evil will; at times he had justified his boast of making her like—almost love him. Now he was overcoming her as by a drug, none the easier to resist because she knew it to be the soporific of sin. Did soul-lust, then, beget soul-lust? Could he make her crave him to some mental excess? Could spirit be welded with spirit in such infernal way that the conscience would be raped as bodies were raped on Earth—ruined for progress and admittance among unsullied consciences after That Day?

The outcome of such a ghoulish union? What manner of offspring would be theirs—if offspring indeed there might be—child-fiend incarnate—spirit-spawn of the passion of an unbodied god?

For her to have begotten the heir-apparent of Gehenna—that would prove righteous the Judgments of Men, even should the Greater Judge consider revoking her decree. Never again could she hope to see John Cabot or their babe.

She had fought her fight with such strength as she could command. What though she lost her own immortal soul through weakness—had not weakness as well as strength been given unto her? She had not been wasted. She had saved those two best-beloved. And, in saving them, had she not saved the greater part of herself? All her loyalty had gone with John. Their babe was the bloom of her heart, that "one, half-blown rose" of the doomed gardener's plea. The safety of them who were all the good in her she had bought. Surely the rest of her did not matter much. Why haggle over the price?

The query dismissed her resistance. Her mind opened to her master's mind, her eyes to his eyes, her lips to his lips. A hideous impulse moved her, like the mania to leap from some incalculable height. Thought-pulse for thought-pulse, her sensation roused to his. A moan of torturing expectancy escaped her . . . she closed her eyes. . . .

She wanted to want him.

In the blackness, Dolores saw the blacker truth. Her swooning sense of obligation to self was shocked into revival. Not him so much as something in herself must she resist—that desire put in woman to be mothers of men. Response

meant utter degradation. More culpable than he who had not known the uplift of true love, she would sink lower far in hate's degeneration. Down and down . . . always down . . . for ever and for ever down. . . .

"I am a woman-soul—I must have love to live, not lust!"

With the cry, she tore herself out of his grasp. And as she regained her feet, the bonds that had seemed so strong, broke apart, like dampened tissue.

"*Vampire!*"

His Highness' hands clutched for her loosened hair. As again she fled him, he leaped in pursuit; abetted his steps with his hands; pulled himself forward with grasps of this and that. When he saw that she was trying the entrance door, he stopped in derisive anticipation of her return. A gleaming object from his pocket he waved at her, as illustration of the mental ban:

"The key, my queen—come and get the key."

His chortles loudened at her desperate exclamation:

"If only I could pray!"

Abruptly, however, he ceased to laugh. He stood alone in the chamber. The locked door had opened to his captive bride—she had passed into the hall.

He followed. Nearer animal instincts than ever in his past, his tall form bent until he ran on toes and finger-tips. Through the private hall-way he raced after her—along the central corridor of the palace into the throne-room.

The great auditorium was dark, except for the jewel-voltage of the altered Mephistophelian coat-of-arms. With intent to point its full significance, the All-Man headed off his quarry from doors and windows and drove her toward the dais. There he seized the back-waving banner of her hair and dragged her up the steps. With his free hand he gestured upward.

"Your artistry is unexcelled, Queen Dolores—your sense of fitness finer than mine own. That you should lead me here is a right royal inspiration."

Further excited by her struggles, he laughed the louder. Sinking on one knee, he again crowded over her.

"You have taught me and I have learned. No longer do

I ask. I take. Lo, at this touch of you, resistant, I feel—I *feel*! Your lips—at this taste of them—a-ah, almost do I taste! At last, fiend-houri—at last—at last—our eternal moment has begun."

As he held her head to the step, Dolores saw that the horns which a few minutes before had been neatly trimmed, were showing through his hair. Not daring to face the compelling power which had made possible this phenomenon, she shifted her gaze, first to the escutcheon, then quickly to the dome.

"If only I knew You, God!"

"That name in my presence?" Irony followed the Belialic snarl. "Why hang back for an introduction if you believe the Great-I-Am stronger than I? It wouldn't be the first time that a total stranger had rescued a damsel in distress. Why not ask Him, little heathen? It will do no harm to ask."

Unloosening his hand from her hair, he jerked her to her feet. Dolores, not knowing what next he might will, backed to the wall. There, with eyes and arms uplifted, she acted in earnest upon his mocking advice.

"*God save me!*" she voiced her first prayer. "I am sinking. I shall be lost. Are you there, O God? Only You can save my soul."

Higher than the arch-blasphemer's shrieks of derision, fugued the storm winds without. At their demand, the entrance doors swung wide to admit them. Across the great room they swept, gentling only at the flutter of veilings about the girl-soul at bay against the wall.

Close after them lightnings slashed the darkness. Behind her head, from tip to tip of her upraised hands, thence to her sandalled feet, they concentrated in rays of blinding light.

Crouched to spring, Satan fell back as if struck. In the down-shed blaze his face worked with superstition. His whine ended in two gasped words.

"*The Cross!*"

Into power unmeasured by watts or kilowatts increased the rays. They irradiated the face of her whose shape they framed with a beauty never before seen in Gehenna—the beauty of realized hope.

The uproar of the storm concentrated in one stupendous crash. From out the contrasting stillnesses, there then spoke a Voice calmer and deeper than the deepest tone of the sea—"a voice . . . as the voice of many waters and . . . of a great thunder and . . . of harpers harping with their harps":

"*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"

Prone fell the Destroyer, lest he be destroyed. Face downward before that sign, which was the sign of his one fear, he writhed upon the floor. From his forked tongue hissed threats and pleas:

"Go away! How dare you trespass into the kingdom I have made for myself? Don't blast me. You promised time until Judgment. I'll give up the girl-shade. I'll do anything you say. Don't blast me now. I might, you know, repent."

Without daring to look up, he tugged at the hem of Dolores' robe.

"You're to go—to leave Gehenna," he upflung in his immortal fright. "Don't wait to prepare. Take this signet ring. It will pass you through the gates. Hurry, lest you ruin me with the rest of those that craved you. Go, Dolores. As you love me—as you hate me—for Hell's sake, *go*!"

For long after she had gone, he lay. Only his lips moved, muttering.

"He could have finished me that time. He must have certain powers of His own, like—like her. Since He can come and go at will, I wonder why He waits. To-night—I feel afraid—my Great Intention——"

The winds appeared to be subsiding. Evidently they had been roused in his spirit-bride's defence. In time he risked a glance toward the Sign. It had faded entirely. Not a glimmer of it remained to indicate that picture of wondrous loveliness which lately it had lit.

A sob racked His Lowness. His hands searched about, as though for some treasure he had lost.

"Dolores, *Dolores*, Grief to Men and Grief to me. What a fate, to learn love from the loss of it!"

His fingers found something to clutch. Sitting up, he examined what they contained—fragments of the illusion

of her veil. He bathed his face in them; swayed sensuously to the feel of them.

"Even the mist of your memory weakens me. Wasted—*you*—when I may never be so bad again?"

Satan became interested in a stinging sensation in one eye never felt before. With a forefinger he touched the lid. Its tip was not moist. Yet the pressure within increased. Excitement caught him as he realized what must be about to occur. He lifted his voice in a shouted command.

"Holder of the Tear Bowl! Quick—to hand—the Bowl!"

When only the reverberations of his voice made response, he bemoaned the lost opportunity.

"Through the sorrows of all ages to expect it, only that, when it comes, none should be here to catch it!"

It fell. A great, gleaming, heavy drop, it slipped from beneath its lid. Salt as brine, it smarted as it rolled down his cheek. Yet no watery, crocodile effluence was this. It did not spatter on the floor. Lasting as a diamond it looked.

Carefully he picked it up. Solemnly he examined it. This tear that he had shed—his first—perhaps his last—was of that sincerest sort, a tear of pity for himself.

Meanwhile, straight and swift as the spirit's cry, Dolores had fled the palace. Out of the portal and through the gate she ran, past darting demons abroad to enjoy the fury of the storm. A slim creature in white gleaming through the blackness, she fluttered the imagination of a group of celebrants staggering from an overplus of draughts inhaled to the consort of the King. With raucous cries and out-clutching hands, several pursued her. But too slow were they, or too fleet she.

At the Gehennan gates, the guard fell back, advised by the evil eye of the royal signet ring. Once safely outside, she turned and flung the blazing trophy back to them.

Seemingly alone, she felt the presence of guards stronger than they, and more spiritual than herself. These she did not fear to trust, so tenderly did shadowy wings seem to surround her, so firmly was she steadied from stumbling, so wise was the counsel she heard. Although the storm still raged,

the lightnings concentrated before her and illumined her way, as up and up she sped.

With her sped happy thoughts. John she soon should find. That she knew. Her feet were swift from lightsomeness, and he could not have progressed far, all weighted as he was by the burden of his disappointment. Amor and Innocentia—even now her sweet comrades must be seeking her. All things of her they knew, and never for long had they deserted her. Since they were not born of Earth, they must be well acquainted with the bypaths of this strange Beyond. Should the way to John prove difficult, the love-lad would lead her aright. If reproach still looked from out the soul of him she had forsworn, Innocentia would appeal. John and their babe she soon should find, then all would be well.

Broader and brighter before her shafted that penetrating Light whose rays she had seen to reach the soddenest scenes of Earth and the dankest depths of the Lower Land. Now it dispersed the shadows from her dreading heart and darkened mind.

Her former nescience, then, had not mattered to the Great-I-Am! He had known her all along; had deplored her plight; had awaited her wish for an introduction. That restraint which had so fascinated her in one of Earth was but an impulse from infinite restraint. No longer need she fear for the fate of the Universe. The All-Power which had restrained itself towards her that she might work out her own development, would strike when the souls of men cried out, even as she had cried, their dependence. Come The Day, His Majesty would fail of his own impotency. Faith, then, was not the fear of fools. Faith was the courage of gods and men, a heritage divine.

No voice of sad women or of sobbing winds was Dolores' as, peering and hurrying, her joy lifted in fragments of lines learned from a singer on Earth.

"*Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom. . . .*"

Now a flash of white through whiteness, she sped and sang:

"*The night is dark and I am far from home. . . .*"

Into the land of Hope—into air so vital that realization

seemed already reached—into a life of no more sorrows, no more tears——

"*Lead Thou me on.*"

From neither sun nor moon came the glory that lit the girl-soul's way. She knew and knew. "Home" the Light was leading her. From it she had come. To it she was now returned.

The strength of that Hell she had fled was only hate.

The Light—the *Light* was Love.

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